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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

And His Message

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By

SWAMI TEJASANANDA

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SARADAPITHA
BELUR MATH

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

"Swami Vivekananda and His Message" is a serious attempt at faithfully depicting the life-history and the universal teachings of the great Swami Vivekananda by a distinguished monastic member of our Order. We have no doubt that the explosive ideas of this dynamic soul, which have been very lucidly presented in the Volume, will considerably help prepare the way for a united pilgrimage of mankind towards self-understanding and lasting peace which are so much in demand in this age of ideological conflicts amongst the nations of the East and the West. We shall consider our endeavour amply rewarded if this can fulfil to a certain extent the sacred purpose for which it has been written.

This book was originally published in the form of an article in *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* in 1963. In response to the pressing demand for its publication as a separate book, we have now brought it out in the present form and priced it also very low so as to bring it within the easy reach of all.

We are deeply indebted to Swami Sambuddhananda, General Secretary of the Swami Vivekananda Centenary Committee for his kindly giving us the necessary permission to publish it separately.

October 1, 1965 S. A.

It may be, that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Vivekananda's Advent: A Historical Necessity

To-day in the midst of the full blaze of our political independence, we recall with pride and reverence the hallowed memory of Swami Vivekananda who occupies a unique place in the shining galaxy of the illustrious sons of modern India. His advent into the arena of Indian life was a historical necessity. India, then under the political thumb of the British, was passing through a welter of cultural ideals as a result of the influx of occidental thought which, with its sparkling glamour, lured the unwary children of the soil into a position of utter helplessness through a silent process of intellectual, social and economic exploitation. Against such a tragic background, Swami Vivekananda whose short life we are attempting to depict in the following pages, was projected into the nineteenth century by the birth-throes of Nature as a mighty challenge to the ideology of the West. At the clarion-call of this heroic monk, the slumbering soul of India was stirred to its inmost depth and it expressed itself in a magnificent variety of creative activity. The accumulated spiritual forces of three hundred and thirty millions of people compressed themselves as it were into the multi-coloured life of this towering personality who set himself to the Herculean task of rebuilding the nation on the basis of a synthetic ideal bearing in it the best elements of the cultural contributions of the East and the West. The nation in which the great Swami was born leaped up into a full flame of life and regained its long-lost freedom in the course of a few decades, and the rest of the world also did not escape the overmastering influence of his life-giving message. Consciously or unconsciously, the humanity has begun to weave into the texture of its cultural life the explosive ideas of this dynamic soul for the reconstruction of a new social order in the world.

Ancestry and Childhood

This illustrious Swami Vivekananda was born as child Narendranath in the famous Dutta family of Simla in the northern part of Calcutta on Monday, the 12th January, 1863 (just a few minutes before sunrise on the 7th day of the new moon in the month of Pous—the day of *Makara Sankranti*—a great religious festival of the Hindus). His ancestors were noted for their liberal education and high standard of culture, unbounded charity and catholicity of outlook. His grandfather Durga Charan Dutta who was well versed in Persian and Sanskrit, renounced the world and took to the life of a monk at the age of twenty-five immediately after the birth of his son Viswanath Dutta. The latter endowed with the sterling qualities of head and heart and possessing the traits and traditions of the family soon grew up to manhood and like his father devoted himself to the study of Persian. Moreover, he got himself educated in English schools and colleges and eventually became a prominent attorney-at-law in the High Court of Calcutta. He had a princely income in his legal profession but, due to his large-hearted sympathy for the afflicted and indiscriminate charity, he spent his ample earning without any thought of the morrow and as a result he could hardly store up and leave behind, till the end, any fortune for his family.

Viswanath was wedded to a lady Bhubaneswari by name, who was adorned with similar exemplary virtues. Her austere habits, dignity of conduct, devotional frame of mind, love for the poor and the helpless, sense of discipline and, above all, her superb capacity for the management of domestic affairs made her an ideal mistress of the house-hold. She developed from her tender age a spirit of calm resignation to God and took special interest in the study of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—the store-house of India's spiritual culture which she passed on to her children as a valued heritage for building up their life and character. It was no wonder that Narendranath—the future Swami Vivekananda, born of these noble parents and inheriting such glorious traditions, would blossom forth in after years as one of the most powerful personalities destined to usher in an age of fresh glory for India and a new order of things for the world outside.

From his very childhood Narendranath began to show unmistakable signs of his future greatness. The indomitable spiritual power with which he was ushered into life, struggled for expression even in his tender age in a variety of ways. Sometimes he would grow so restless that two nurses had to be engaged to keep him under control. He was moreover a great tease. Nettled at his wild pranks and naughtiness, when his sisters chased him, he would quickly take shelter in an open drain full of garbage and begin to grin and grimace at them with impunity as he knew that they would not venture to that filthy spot. Narendranath, whose spiritual power was destined in after years to move the world, felt the spirit of greatness within him even at this early age and would not allow himself to be dominated by anybody. In his favourite game of the "King and the Court", he would be the King and others his subordinates. He would hold a Durbar with all regal paraphernalia and dispense justice with royal dignity. The coachman donning a turban on the head and flourishing a whip in the hand was to Naren an ideal hero and he aspired in his childhood to become a groom so as to enjoy such a commanding position.

We notice also a glimpse of his spiritual life at this period. When he went to bed at night, he used to visualize an effulgent light between his eyebrows, which waxed bigger and bigger till at last it covered his whole body and gradually soothed him into deep sleep. Sometimes, he would play at meditation along with his friends and become so much absorbed in it that he lost all outward consciousness. Once, so deep was his meditation that he could not feel even the presence of a deadly cobra that neared him with its expanded hood, while his comrades ran helter-skelter to a safer distance out of fear, shouting danger to Narendranath. When subsequently interrogated by the mother why he did not move from his seat in the face of such an imminent peril, he calmly replied that he did not know a jot and tittle of what happened outside as he was inwardly experiencing an ineffable joy in his meditation.

Naren had a particular fascination for itinerant monks. The very sight of a *sadhu* at the door evoked in him an instinctive feeling of kinship with him. It threw him into such an ecstasy of delight that he would instantly give the monk, as an offering, whatever he could find near at hand in the room. To prevent this reckless charity and wastage, the mother Bhubaneswari had to lock up Naren whenever any *sadhu* was seen coming to the house with a begging bowl in hand.

Naren's education began at the knee of his mother from whom he learnt the Bengali alphabet and the first English words. His boyish imagination very often travelled back to the hallowed days of the epic past, when he listened with rapt attention to the romantic tales of the *Ramayana* as told by the mother, and he became so much thrilled to hear these soul-stirring episodes that he began to offer worship to Sita-Rama and earnestly longed to have a vision of the devout Hanuman. Then again, the all-renouncing Shiva captivated his heart and became the object of his unbounded love and adoration. So prodigious was also his retentive power that he learnt by heart lengthy passages of the great epics, simply by hearing, and mastered the whole of the *Mugdhabodha*—a Sanskrit Grammar—even at the age of seven. These extraordinary powers and the inborn religious instinct so spontaneously manifested in a sparkling variety of forms even in childhood, gave faint but sure indications of what a great spiritual destiny was in store for him in future.

Boyhood and Early Education

As years rolled on, Viswanath became anxious to see his son properly educated in a good English school. With this end in view, he got Naren admitted in 1870 to the Metropolitan Institution founded by Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. But such a rigid routine life did hardly fit. in with Naren's restless temperament. Even during class hours, he would move to and fro and entertain his class-mates with interesting stories, the while he listened to the lesson with his inborn capacity to double the mind. Sometimes he would convert the class room into a play-ground. It thus became a hard job for the teachers to tackle such an exceptionally meritorious but turbulent student.

His inventive genius led him to devise various ways and means one after the other to canalize his cooped up exuberant energy. To beguile himself and others he would start an amateur theatrical party and hold dramatic performances in the worship-hall of the house with the help of his friends. When carried to excess, they were abruptly stopped by the parents, and Naren immediately improvised a gymnasium in the spacious courtyard. But he had to bundle up things at the instance of his elders when one of his cousins sustained a fracture of his arm. Nothing discouraged or daunted, he joined the gymnasium of his neighbour and soon interested himself in fencing, lathi-play, wrestling, rowing and other manly sports likely to help build his physique. There was another avenue to get rid of his superfluous energy. He would very often climb the tree of a neighbour's garden, swing violently from a branch with his head thrown downward, somersault to the ground and thus disturb the peace of the locality. The half-blind grandfather of the house, to scare away Naren and his group of friends, told them with all seriousness that the tree was haunted by a hobgoblin (a *Brahmadaitya*) and it would break the necks of those who would not desist from these acrobatics in the garden. The companions of Naren scented danger and asked him not to repeat it in future. But the shrewd Naren saw through the whole game and told his affrighted friends that his neck would have been long off, had there been even an iota of truth in the ghost-story of the granddad. Referring to such superstitious ideas, Narendranath (as Swami Vivekananda) used to say to others, "Do not believe a thing because another has said it is so. Find out the truth for yourself. That is realisation."

This precocious boy exhibited exceptional intelligence and presence of mind in his younger days under most trying circumstances and earned the love and admiration of his associates. Once a British man-of-war 'the Syrapis' anchored at the Calcutta Port during the visit of the late Emperor Edward VII, the then Prince of Wales, and, like many others, Naren with a group of friends wanted to see the ship for which a formal permission from an English official was necessary. Naren was too young and as such was refused permission by the porter to enter the officer's room in the upper storey. Thus baffled, he quickly went round and discovered a staircase in the rear whereby he stealthily went up to the first floor and took his stand in the line with others with his application in hand. When his turn came in the queue, it was duly signed by the officer without any question. While going out, Naren was asked by the outwitted door-keeper how he could enter the room. Naren smilingly said to the amazed porter, "Oh, I am a magician".

On another occasion, he and his friends hired a country boat for going to the Nawab's Zoological Garden at Metiabruz, a suburb of south Calcutta.

While returning, one of his friends suddenly fell sick and vomited. The boatmen flew into a rage and threatened the boys with dire consequences if they did not immediately clean up the boat. Seeing the situation very precarious, the boy Naren jumped ashore and ran up to the two British soldiers who were passing that way and in broken English narrated their woeful plight. The handsome look of the boy arrested their attention and, realizing the situation, they hurried to the spot and immediately ordered the boatmen to release the boys on pain of severe punishment. Terrified at the sight of the soldiers, the boatmen set the boys free and instantly disappeared from the scene. Needless to point out that the affair would have taken a very ugly turn but for the presence of mind of the sharp-witted Narendranath.

Another side of the character of Narendranath began to reveal itself as he advanced in years. Exceptionally gifted, Naren gave himself up to intellectual pursuits for the acquisition of knowledge in the various branches of study with steadfast zeal and soon developed a critical judgment and argumentative power which were the despair of many at this age. Besides, he was a staunch votary of truth and from his boyhood shunned like venom all the evil ways of life. Though he was outwardly a little stern and rough, his heart was full of the milk of human kindness and he would be the first to rush to the aid of any person found involved in danger or difficulty. Moreover, his inborn spiritual instinct prompted him to spend more time from now in meditation at night and as a result he was occasionally blessed with wonderful visions.

Naren felt a natural kinship with Nature, the bewitching beauties—the various sights and sounds of which very often awakened in him deep spiritual emotions and plunged him into trance. In 1877, when Naren was reading in the third class, his father went to Raipur in the Central Provinces, instructing the family to proceed to that place later under the guidance of his son Naren. It so happened that the party had to traverse a long distance for days together by bullock carts through dense jungles and over high hills. Naren was extremely delighted to enjoy the freedom of the open in the course of his long trek through the forest. The solemn silence of the surroundings, the melodious warblings of birds of variegated colours, the soft beauty of the green foliage of trees and creepers begemmed with sweet-scented flowers, the luxuriant verdure hiding the ugliness of the earth underneath—all combined to conjure up before the fervid imagination of the boy a realm of heavenly bliss rarely to be met with in this world of tears. One day, while passing through the Vindhya Hills where the lofty peaks shot up high overhead on either side, Naren all on a sudden noticed a vastly expanded bee-hive hanging with its millions of busy and buzzing inmates in a deep cleft in one of the hills. The very sight of such a big hive which was the product of centuries of indefatigable labour of these untiring and industrious battalions of bees reminded him of the immensity of the universe and the vastness of the power of the Almighty Creator and threw him instantly into a trance. So deep it was that he remained unconscious on the bullock cart for hours together. When he regained normal consciousness, he found that a long distance had been covered by this time. This was the first instance when his powerful imagination switched him off from the outer world into the realm of the Unknown and kept him completely oblivious of what happened outside for such a long period.

There being no school at the time in Raipur, Naren was now altogether free from the obligation of learning the routine-lessons of a class. He thus got a golden opportunity to utilize this leisure in the study of standard books on different subjects. His father Viswanath also gave the boy complete freedom in this regard so that he might develop according to his own line of growth. Moreover, to stimulate the boy's intellectual curiosity and intensify his eagerness to enrich the stock of knowledge, he used to hold long discussions with him upon difficult topics which required precision and depth of thought. In this way, Naren's intellectual horizon was greatly widened under the loving guidance of his learned father. Thus Narendranath had finished a good number of important books on history and mastered many standard works of the English and Bengali literature by the time he completed his school career.

On their return to Calcutta in 1879, Naren was re-admitted to the school. An intellectual prodigy and a born genius, Narendranath made up the loss very quickly and passed the Entrance Examination at the age of sixteen in the first division—a unique distinction attained by him alone in that Institution for which he was rewarded with a watch by his father.

Collegiate Education

Narendranath was now sixteen. He had grown up by that time to be a sturdy young man of great intellectual acumen and strong moral principles. His collegiate education began at the Presidency College, Calcutta, where he studied First Arts for one year. Subsequently, he got himself admitted to the Scottish Churches College and passed the F.A. Examination in 1881 in the second division. It is interesting to note that it was during this period that Narendranath heard for the first time about his future Master Sri Ramakrishna from the then Principal William Hastie. The Principal, in the course of his lecture on Wordsworth's *Excursion,* tried to explain how the celebrated English poet fell into deep trance, while contemplating the beauties of Nature; but when the young students could not ascend to the apprehension of this subtle experience of the poet, he referred to Sri Ramakrishna, the great saint of Dakshineswar, whom he had known to be the only person who had an experience of that blessed state of mind. He asked the boys to see the sage and understand for themselves what was implied by that mystic trance.

In his college days, Naren developed an inordinate tendency to go through standard books on a variety of subjects, and by the time he passed the B.A. Examination, he had acquired a thorough grasp of the masterpieces of Western Logic and Philosophy and the histories of the different nations of Europe. Principal William Hastie was so much impressed by the sterling parts and the intellectual daring of Naren that he once remarked to the other alumni, "Naren is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German Universities, amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make a mark in life".[1] The prophecy of this learned teacher about his talented student was more than justified by the unique position to which his inborn spiritual genius elected him in the course of a few years.

As days rolled on, Narendranath's intimate acquaintance with the startling contributions of the scientists of the West and the rationalistic thoughts and ideas of John Stuart Mill, Hume, Descartes, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and such other free thinkers and writers of the Occident began to demolish his long-cherished pet ideas and sentiments, dealt heavy blows at his deep-seated

[1] *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples, 6th Edn., p. 26.

faith in the Hindu gods and goddesses, and raised such a tumult of doubt in his mind that he grew restless and became almost a sceptic. But his innate spiritual nature did not allow him to remain satisfied with that state of mind. It battled incessantly against all these alluring nihilistic thoughts and more often than not asserted itself, even in the midst of these harassing doubts and agonizing mental struggles, to get a glimpse of the Unknown in whose existence he did never lose faith. For, a person who was born to solve the manifold problems of life and thereby to dispense spiritual pabulum to the myriads of hungering souls, cannot be so easily swamped by the spate of these materialistic ideas. Narendranath's lacerated heart now cried for a healing balm and it came, through divine dispensation, at this critical hour, from an unexpected quarter.

It has already been hinted at the outset that India was wading through a bewildering variety of cultural ideals from the close of the 18th century right up to the middle of the 19th due to the influx of atheistic and materialistic ideas of the West into the realm of Indian thought. But a race with its hoary spiritual traditions and rich cultural heritage can hardly be conquered by an exotic civilization so easily. India's instinct of self-preservation woke up to meet this challenge of the West and some socio-religious movements came into existence and stood as a bulwark for the time being against the advancing tide of alien thought and culture. The first to take the field was the Brahma-Sabha, later called the Brahmo Samaj, started in 1828 A.D. by Raja Rammohan Roy, the great patriot and reformer of modern India. The next to follow was the Arya Samaj launched in 1875 in Bombay by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, a thundering polemic who was aggressively hostile to Islam and Christianity. Simultaneously with the inauguration of the Arya-Samaj, another reforming Body named Theosophical Society was started in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky (a Russian lady). Though it had its origin in New York, its tenets were adapted to the needs and requirements of the Indian people and subsequently introduced into this country. Each of these reform movements stressed some elements of Hindu faith and tried to meet the blind dogmatists on the one hand and the ultra-rationalists on the other in its own peculiar way and succeeded partially in stemming the tide of westernization and reviving to a certain extent the dormant spiritual consciousness of the Indians.

However, of these three movements, the Brahmo Samaj that protested against certain forms and tenets of the orthodox Hinduism such as polytheism, image worship, Divine Incarnation and the need of a *guru*, on the religious side, and advocated the equality of man and the education and emancipation of women and the abolition of caste, on the social side, made a strong appeal to the imagination of young Bengal, and Naren who was greatly captivated by the oratorical talents, personal magnetism, sincerity of feeling and the integrity of character of Keshab Chandra Sen, the then leader of the Brahmo Samaj, looked upon this society as the ideal institution for the solution of life's problems, individual and collective, and identified himself with it for the time being. Thus he regularly began to attend prayers and became a staunch camp-follower of Keshab Chandra. But this kind of life bereft of that spiritual dash and depth and also of the spirit of renunciation that were absolutely necessary for a deeper plunge into the core of Reality could not hold him fast for long to that reformist institution, however intellectual its atmosphere might be, and he naturally sought for some other avenues to get nearer to the truth, the realization of which now became the burning passion of his life.

While Naren was in this unsettled state of mind, two alluring ideals presented themselves simultaneously to him. Sometimes he felt that he possessed tremendous power and capacity to rise to the pinnacle of mundane glory if he took to the life of a house-holder; but at the same time he became charmed by the glowing picture of an all-renouncing monk free from the tentacles of all worldly bondages, and roaming with a begging bowl in hand without any thought of the morrow, and he instinctively felt that he possessed the requisite spiritual fire to embrace the lofty monastic ideal of renunciation and poverty. In this conflict of ideals, Naren's genuine spiritual impulse eventually triumphed and opened unto him the real path he should follow for the fulfilment of his noble aspiration.

In his earnest longing to realize the truth he once went to Maharshi Devendranath Tagore who was regarded by many at the time as highly advanced in matters spiritual. With high hopes swelling in the heart, Naren posed the query to the Maharshi with all sincerity, "Sir, have you seen God?" But no answer in the affirmative came from that great personage. Sorely disappointed, Narendranath came away and began to approach the leaders of different religious orders with the very same question, but got no satisfactory solution in this regard. At this moment of bewilderment, he remembered to have seen Sri Ramakrishna, the sage of Dakshineswar, once in the house of his neighbour Sri Surendranath Mitra in November, 1881, where he had been invited to sing. The motherly love and care with which the great saint Sri Ramakrishna had made affectionate enquiries about him on that occasion and asked him to visit Dakshineswar now rushed to his memory and Naren decided at this hour of mental trouble and confusion to see him soon for a positive reply to his searching query.

Sri Ramakrishna at the Temple Garden of Dakshineswar

Before we proceed to deal with the historic meeting of the two mighty souls in the serene atmosphere of the temple-garden of Dakshineswar, we would do well to remember that the three reformist movements referred to above, however well intentioned, were extremely sectional in their character. They failed to grasp the grand chord of unity running through the colourful multiplicity of the creeds of Hinduism, and characterized, through ignorance, its various essential aspects as rank superstitions. Their efforts to purge the Hindu faith of all that appeared to them redundant could not, therefore, capture the imagination of the orthodox school of thought and produce the desired result.

It cannot, however, be gainsaid that the Hindu faith, notwithstanding its universality, needed readjustment to cleanse its musty chambers scored with the accumulated outworn usages and customs as also with the meaningless inhibitions of centuries. But the orthodox section of the Hindu society plodded on listlessly without paying much heed to the aggressive march of foreign thoughts. They stuck fast to their age-old beliefs and refused to adjust themselves according to the intellectual demands of the time. This stiff-necked attitude of the conservative masses proved a stumbling block in the regeneration of the Hindu religion and culture. There was, therefore, a dire necessity for the growth of a movement that would be able not only to respond to the time-forces but also to harmonize the fundamental instincts of India's social organism, i.e. the instinct of conservatism and that of expansion, for a complete renaissance of the Hindu faith. This was fulfilled in the spiritual personality of Sri Ramakrishna who came to focus the attention of the self-forgetful Indians on the treasures of their indigenous culture which bore in it the strength and vitality for infinite expansion and world conquest.

Sri Ramakrishna was born on the soil of Bengal on the 18th of February, 1836, in an orthodox Brahmin family of Kamarpukur in the district of Hooghly. His father Kshudiram Chattopadhyay and mother Chandra Devi were held in high reverence by the villagers for their righteousness, dignity of character, devotion to gods and goddesses, and large-hearted sympathy for the poor and the helpless. Gadadhar, for that was the name of the child, bore all the noble traits of his devout parents. From his early age Gadadhar developed a contemplative habit and a deep regard for saints and sages. He sometimes passed into ecstatic trances at the sight of a charming phenomenon of Nature, or while singing devotional songs or while playing the role of Shiva in a village *yatra* performance. Secular education was repugnant to the boy; for he wanted to acquire that wisdom which would help him to realize God and thereby to transcend the miseries of the world. After the death of Kshudiram, Ramakumar, the eldest brother of Gadadhar, took him to his Sanskrit *Tol* at Jhamapukur in Calcutta where both the brothers managed with great difficulty to earn some money to meet the bare needs of the family.

About this time Rani Rashmani, a well-to-do pious and influential Hindu lady of Calcutta, founded a Kali Temple at Dakshineswar about four miles to the north of the city. Ramakumar who was well-known and respected in the locality for his profound scholarship and liberal ideas, was appointed a priest at the temple of Goddess Kali. Gadadhar also followed his elder brother and began to live with him in the temple-garden which was altogether free from the din and bustle of the town life. He was elated with joy to get such a golden opportunity to lead a life of contemplation in that hallowed and sequestered place by the side of the holy Ganges. The atmosphere of intense peace and blessedness, the living presence of the Divine Mother and the sanctity of the surroundings awakened in him a deep religious emotion for the realization of God and soon brought about a phenomenal change in his nature. After the demise of his elder brother, Gadadhar (whom we shall now call by the name of Sri Ramakrishna) was appointed to the post of the priest at the Kali Temple. The transitoriness of the worldly things did never impinge on his soul so deeply as it did at this time. For twelve long years his God-intoxicated mind remained completely dead to the outside world as a great religious tornado raged within him during this long period of *sádhaná*. His mind and body knew no rest till his mad spiritual quest was crowned with the vision of the Supreme Reality. He reached a plane of spiritual consciousess wherefrom he could view with love and sympathy all forms of religious beliefs extant in the world. He explored for humanity all the approaches to the realm of eternal wisdom; for there was no religious faith that he did not practise and no truth that he did not realize in the course of his *sádhaná*. He verified in his life that "The three great orders of metaphysical thought—dualism, modified monism and absolute monism—are stages on the way to the Supreme Truth. They are not contradictory, but rather when added the one to the other are complementary". The various paths—*jnána, karma, bhakti* and *yoga,*—all lead to the same goal, if followed with steady zeal and application, and no colour, caste, creed or sex is any the least bar to the sacred temple of realization.[2]

This profound realization of Sri Ramakrishna did not remain cooped up within the four walls of the temple-garden. Like bees swarming to suck honey from fully blossomed flowers, seekers after Truth began to flock in large numbers to this great

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[2] Swami Tejasananda, *Ramakrishna Movement: Its Ideal & Activities,* 2nd Edn., pp. 3-4.

Prophet of Dakshineswar to get their spiritual thirst satisfied. Well-known *Vaishnava* and *Tántrika sádhakas,* itinerant monks of different religious denominations, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, Christians, Muhammedans, Sikhs, great literary geniuses and philosophical thinkers, theologians and professors, the illustrious leaders of the Brahmo Samaj including Keshab Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Vijaykrishna Goswami and others gradually came into intimate contact with this magnetic personality and became deeply impressed by his universal teachings and catholic outlook. But Sri Ramakrishna's heart was not satisfied with his association and talks with these people, however great they were in their respective spheres. He wanted a heroic band of immaculate souls who, imbued with the lofty spirit of renunciation and self-sacrifice, would dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the service of humanity at large. So strong was his yearning for their advent that he used very often to go to the roof of the building in the garden and cry out at the top of his voice in the agony of his heart, "Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you". He shed bitter tears in his ardent longing to meet these unsophisticated children of the Divine Mother, who would bear the Cross manfully and become real instruments for the propagation of his message in the world. This earnest prayer of the Master that welled up from the inmost core of his being did not go in vain. Beckoned as it were by Providence, sincere devotees began to cluster round him one by one and Narendranath, the leader of this brilliant galaxy of immaculate souls who were to become later monks of the Order of Sri Ramakrishna, one day went to Dakshineswar in response to the divine call to meet his future *guru* who was awaiting, with a breathless thrill of expectancy, the arrival of his spiritual child in the serene peace of this holy place for the fulfilment of his own mission on earth.

Meeting of Master-minds

The union of these two master-minds that were almost poles asunder in points of education and culture, religious beliefs, and ideologies, was of great historical significance. It was like the meeting of the two streams of thought coming from two opposite directions and forming into a confluence. In other words, it symbolized a bold challenge of the scientific West to the spiritual idealism of the East. This fact has been beautifully portrayed in the following few lines in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda,*[3] "Sri Ramakrishna was the heart of old India, with its spiritual perspective, its asceticism and its realizations,—the India of the Upanishads. Naren came to him with all the doubts and scepticism of the modern age, unwilling to accept even the highest truths of religion without verification, yet with a burning zeal for the truth raging within him... The result of the contact of these two great personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath, was the Swami Vivekananda who was to become the heart of a New India with the ancient spiritual perspective heightened, widened and strengthened to include modern learning; old ideas assimilating the new. The intense activity of the West to be combined with the deep meditation of the East. Asceticism and retirement were to be supplemented by work and service to others. From the merging of these two currents came Neo-Hinduism, the faith of a glorious Tomorrow, in which all should be fulfilment and nothing denial."

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[3] *Life of Swami Vivekananda* published by the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. I., pp. 53-54.

Narendranath, accompanied by some of his friends, came one day in a carriage to Dakshineswar and entered the room of Sri Ramakrishna by the western door. At the very sight, Sri Ramakrishna recognized Naren to be the person who was destined to carry his message to the world. He moreover recalled his previous beatific vision in the course of which he saw seated in the transcendental realm seven *rishis* lost in profound meditation and surpassing not only men but even gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. That Narendranath was one of these *rishis*, who signified his desire to come down to the earth to help fulfil his divine mission in the world, flashed before him with all vividness, and

Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed with an uncontrollable emotion to see the same old sage standing before him in the form of Narendranath at Dakshineswar. Amidst sobs and with tears of joy rolling down his cheeks, Sri Ramakrishna addressed him most tenderly, saying, "Ah, you come so late! How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long! My ears are well nigh burnt in listening to the profane talks of worldly people. Oh, how I yearn to unburden my mind to one who can appreciate my innermost experience". Thereafter he stood before him with folded hands and began to address him, "Lord, I know you are that ancient sage, Nara—the Incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind". Narendranath was thunderstruck to hear these strange and apparently irrelevant words from Sri Ramakrishna to whom he had come to get a proper solution of the most critical problem of his life. Nothing annoyed or puzzled, Naren boldly put his long-cherished question: "Have you seen God, Sir"? "Yes, I see Him just as I see you, only in a much intenser sense. God can be realized; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself." Narendranath was greatly impressed by what Sri Ramakrishna had told him with all sincerity and candidness of a child, though his strange words and queer behaviour made him a little suspicious of the normalcy of his mental condition. He was however satisfied that he had after all met a man who could asseverate with the certitude of conviction of a seer that he had realized God and others could also be blessed with the vision of the Supreme Truth if they followed suit. Narendranath took leave of the Master after giving him the assurance that he would come to see him again very soon.

Narendranath's second visit was more remarkable for a much stranger experience which is described in his own words as follows: "I found him (Sri Ramakrishna) sitting alone on the small bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on his bed...But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open, I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into naught and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing Void! I was terribly frightened, and I thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself I cried out, 'What is it that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!' He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time!' The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before".

Was it mesmerism or hypnotism?—Naren asked himself. He could not however persuade himself to believe that it was so. For, how could an unlettered *fakir* exercise such an overmastering influence upon the strong and resolute mind of a person of his own intellectual calibre? All the same, he could not deny Sri Ramakrishna's superhuman mental force that acted so powerfully on him with the suddenness of an electric flash. It thus became a baffling mystery to Naren that a person could smash to pieces a strong mind like his in a trice and at the same time treat him with uncommon love and kindness. Rationalist Narendranath was really in a quandary.

Naren did not fare better even on the occasion of his third visit which occurred only a few days later. Immediately after his arrival, he was taken by the Master to the adjacent garden of Jadunath Mallik and made to sit by his side. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna touched Naren who, in spite of all precautions to resist the will of this God-intoxicated man, lost all outward consciousness. The Master learned during this period Naren's antecedents and the mission he would fulfil in this world. Narendranath was now fully convinced that a tremendous spiritual force was working through Sri Ramakrishna. The selfless love and affection bestowed on him and the feeling of blessedness that came upon him by his association with this saint of Dakshineswar drew him closer and closer to the Master from day to day and his doubt about Sri Ramakrishna's mental soundness soon yielded to a feeling of profound respect for him, though it took a little more time for him to accept him as his *guru* once for all in matters spiritual.

A Saint in the Making

The relation between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendranath forms one of the most thrilling episodes in the life-history of this twin personality, as it brings into bold but graceful relief the formative influence of the Master in making Narendranath a full-fledged Swami Vivekananda for the service of humanity. The love of the Master for Naren knew no bounds. It flowed as a freshet uncontaminated by the least tinge of dirt of human or personal sentiment. The Master's emotion of divine love welled up from within in foamy freshness even at the very sight of Naren. His prolonged absence from Dakshineswar would render him so disconsolate that he would sometimes burst into tears and often pass sleepless nights, being unable to bear the pangs of separation.

Sri Ramakrishna was also all praise for Naren for his boldness, spirit of self-reliance, manliness, single-minded devotion to truth and purity of character. He did not hesitate to speak highly of Naren even before others. One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room, surrounded by Sri Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijaykrishna Goswami and other illustrious leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. The Master first glanced at the Brahmo leaders and then at Naren who was also present there. After their departure Sri Ramakrishna began to say to his devotees, "Well, if Keshab is possessed of one mark of greatness which has made him famous, Naren has eighteen such marks. In Keshab and Vijay, I saw the light of knowledge burning like a candle-flame, but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion". Naren felt abashed and strongly remonstrated. Moreover he politely requested the Master not to repeat such remarks in future in the presence of others. The Master said, "I cannot help it. Do you think those were my words? The Divine Mother showed me certain things which I simply repeated. And she never reveals to me anything but truth." Needless to add that this firm conviction of Sri Ramakrishna about Naren's future greatness and his unfailing love and unstinted admiration for him gave him perennial inspiration and indomitable strength especially in later years when he plunged headlong into the whirlpool of activity to fulfil the behest of the great Teacher.

But notwithstanding the Master's intense love and attraction for Naren, the latter was very critical of the spiritual visions of Sri Ramakrishna, which he occasionally confided to Naren and other intimate devotees with the simplicity of a child. Endowed with a rationalistic frame of mind, Naren was not the person to accept anything as gospel truth without testing it in the crucible of his own reason. For, he could not even then realize that intuitive perception which was a transcendental one, stood far beyond the scope of dry intellectualism and was not to be judged in the light of the jugglery of ratiocination. Sri Ramakrishna who had a great admiration for Naren's freedom of thought was inwardly very glad to see this critical attitude in him and gave him ample latitude to develop in his own way through this intellectual strain and struggle which, he firmly believed, would eventually lead this saint-in-the-making to the apogee of spiritual glory.

Sri Ramakrishna's process of training Naren completely differed from what he followed in the case of others. For he knew that Naren belonged to a special category, intellectually, temperamentally and spiritually and his path of evolution was that of *Jnana* (knowledge), and as such he prescribed quite a separate specific for the manifestation of his inborn spiritual genius. Sri Ramakrishna therefore talked very often on

Advaita philosophy with him trying at the same time to bring home to him the identity of the individual soul with *Brahman.* An interesting incident occurred in this connection. One day Naren listened with rapt attention to Sri Ramakrishna's dissertation on the ultimate finding of the *Vedanta* philosophy that everything from the highest to the minutest atom of the universe was but the embodiment of the same *Brahman,* difference being only in names and forms. But Narendranath failing to appreciate it, went to the room of Pratap Chandra Hazra, a dry dialectician, and both began to twit this experience of the Master as the product of a heated brain. Hearing the laughter of Naren, Sri Ramakrishna came out and smilingly said, "Hallo! what are you talking about?" With these words, he touched Naren and plunged into *Samadhi.* The magic touch of the Master brought about a quick change over his mind. Instantaneously he felt that there was nothing but God in the universe! Even when he returned home the very same idea persisted with all vividness. This state of intoxication went on continuously for some days and his mother got alarmed at the sight of the dazed and bewildered condition of her son. However, when he came down to the normal plane of consciousness, he realized that he must have got a glimpse of the *Advaita Vedanta.* About this Narendranath said later on: "Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the *Advaita philosophy*." This incident, though apparently trifling and accidental, increased Naren's regard for Sri Ramakrishna thousandfold, and he began to look upon the Master as the highest ideal of spirituality. Thus "little by little Naren was led from doubt to beatitude, from darkness to light, from anguish of mind to the certainty of bliss, from the seething vortex of the world to the grand expanse of universal oneness."[4]

In the Midst of Domestic Troubles

Time and tide tarry for none. So, days rolled on unnoticed as Narendranath's increasing interest in study and meditation swept him away from the whiz and whirr of the work-a-day world for the time being into the silence of his own lonely closet. But even there he was assailed by many unwanted thoughts and was not allowed to enjoy the calm which he needed and sought for a peaceful pursuit of his studies and contemplation. His parents and other relatives began to worry the youthful Naren with pressing proposals of marriage from well-to-do aristocratic families. But, as expected, the spiritually gifted Naren turned down such requests for marriage with his characteristic abhorrence for a life of sense-enjoyment. When these reports about marriage reached the ears of

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Sri Ramakrishna, he got alarmed. With tears in his eyes, he prayed to the Divine Mother to save his dear Naren from being entangled in the meshes of a marital life, for Naren was meant for a higher avocation in this world. Wonder of wonders! Henceforth whenever such a nuptial arrangement was about to be consummated, some sort of unavoidable impediment stood in the way of its fulfilment!

But a far more trying ordeal now awaited Naren. A few days after the B.A. examination, his father, Viswanath, suddenly died of heart-disease and the whole family was plunged into dire financial distress. As already stated, Viswanath was a spendthrift and as such he spent more than he earned. Immediately after his demise it was discovered that the family was over head and ears in debt. The creditors knocked at the door; the erstwhile friends turned enemies, and the nearest relatives, taking advantage of this helpless condition, filed a suit to oust them all from the house. Nothing daunted, Naren fought manfully, and ultimately triumphed in the litigation in which he had to get himself involved in spite of himself under circumstances over which he had no control.

Narendranath passed the B.A. Examination and began to study law. But starvation soon stared the family in the face. Notwithstanding his best efforts, he was not able to secure any employment anywhere in the city to earn his living. What could be more tragic and painful than to see the future world-renowned Swami Vivekananda roam as a pauper in the streets of Calcutta in the prime of his life from door to door in search of a job to save his distressed family from the icy hand of starvation and death? To fill the cup of misery, a doubt suddenly crept into his storm-tossed mind as to the very existence of Godhead and His even-handed justice and grace. At this hour of mental strife and confusion, one evening, Narendranath, jaded and tired after a whole day's fast and walk, sank down on the outer plinth of a house on the road-side and became unconscious for a time through sheer weariness. All on a sudden, the covering of his soul was removed and he inwardly felt the living presence of a Blissful Providence and found a rational explanation of the co-existence of weal and woe, light and darkness, affluence and poverty in this realm of conflicts and contradictions. Refreshed and rejuvenated with an accession of mental strength and peace due to this wonderful revelation, Naren stood up and came back to his house unnoticed almost at the close of the night.

A consciousness soon dawned on him that he was not born to follow the common rut of a householder's life in this world; that a higher spiritual destiny was in store for him and he must tear himself away from all domestic ties and take to the life of a monk. No sooner did this idea flash in his mind than he got himself ready for carrying it into action. But before the final jump, he wanted to get the blessings of the Master and went to meet him in the house of a devotee in Calcutta where he had come by chance on that day. Sri Ramakrishna, with his deep spiritual insight, immediately divined the inner intention of his beloved disciple and took him that very day to Dakshineswar where he was made to stay for the night. With extreme tenderness and tears in his eyes, Sri Ramakrishna asked Naren not to renounce the world immediately as the time was not yet ripe for such a decisive step. Overpowered with the Master's emotional appeal, Narendranath nodded assent to his wishes and bided the time for the fulfilment of his cherished desire.

But the acute financial want of the family continued to harass him as before and it was crystal clear to him that unless this problem was solved satisfactorily, his dream of striking into the path of monastic life would never become an actuality. So he left no stone unturned from now to find out a suitable avenue for effectively grappling with this distressing situation. No doubt he earned some money by working hard in an attorney's office and also by translating books; but this did not fetch a permanent income to cover the ever-increasing expenses of his family. Finding no way out, Naren besought Sri Ramakrishna to pray for him to the Divine Mother to solve his pecuniary difficulties. Being hard pressed by Naren, Sri Ramakrishna told him that the Divine Mother would grant him whatever he wanted if he himself prayed to Her on that auspicious day. Armed with this belief, Naren slowly proceeded to the temple in the silence of the night in a state of divine intoxication. But the moment he stood in front of the Goddess Kali—the Perennial Spring of Infinite Love and Beauty—he totally forgot all about his sordid material needs and prostrating himself before Her, prayed only for knowledge and devotion, renunciation and love. When the Master came to know from Naren, on his return, what he had asked for, he, though inwardly much pleased, scolded him for this silly forgetfulness. Two other consecutive attempts of Naren in this regard ended with no better results; because, on every occasion, a sudden upsurge of lofty spiritual emotion at the sight of the benign Mother did not allow him to crave for anything else than supreme love and devotion and the vision of the Blissful Mother. Realizing that it was all his Master's play, Naren would not allow Sri Ramakrishna to ignore his request and ultimately elicited from him the benediction that the members of his (Naren's) family would never be in want of plain food and raiment. Referring to these incidents, Narendranath often said afterwards, "It was his unflinching trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love another. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

Training and Transformation

Sri Ramakrishna's presence in the serene atmosphere of Dakshineswar was a source of perennial inspiration—a compelling stimulus to enter into the realm of sublime emotion. It offered a unique opportunity for Narendranath and other young disciples of the Master to mould their lives in the divine image of their spiritual preceptor. His beatific visions, ecstatic trances, inspiring utterances, soul-enthralling devotional songs and, above all, his unprecedented spirit of renunciation served to kindle in their unsophisticated souls a burning desire to be in constant communion with God. Sri Ramakrishna, like a master-physician, diagnosed the needs and requirements of the moral and spiritual health of every aspirant and administered the appropriate anodyne to cure him of his malaise. Thus his spiritual ministration varied according to the individual mental make-up of the aspirants who clustered round his magnetic personality for guidance in matters spiritual. Referring to the peculiarity of the Master's training, Narendranath used to say, "It is impossible to give others even an idea of the ineffable joy we derived from the presence of the Master.... As the master-athlete proceeds with great caution and restraint with the beginner, now overpowering him in the strength with great difficulty, as it were, and again owning defeat at his hands to strengthen his spirit of self-reliance, in exactly the same manner did

Sri Ramakrishna treat us. Realizing that in all exists the *Atman* which is the source of infinite strength, he was able to see the potential giant in every individual, pigmy though he might be. He could clearly discern the latent spiritual power which would, in the fulness of time, manifest itself. Holding that bright picture before us he would speak highly of us and encourage us. Again he would warn us lest we should frustrate this future consummation by becoming entangled in worldly desires, and further he would keep us under control by carefully observing even the minute details of our life. All this was done silently and unobtrusively. That was the great secret of his training of the disciples and moulding of their lives."

Of the young disciples, Naren possessed the most penetrating intellect and was also critical, and as such he did not accept as gospel truth any word of the Master without carefully weighing it in the balance of his judgement; whereas his other disciples who were of the devotional type and were generally guided more by emotion than by reason, did not consider it necessary to probe into the genuineness or otherwise of the inspired utterances of Sri Ramakrishna. Narendranath thus differed fundamentally in temper and genius from other disciples of the Master. Endowed with a rare insight and intellectual acumen, Naren was also able to assess the real value and deep import of the pregnant expressions of the Master, which, more often than not, eluded the comprehension of his other disciples. One example would suffice: One day some time during the year 1884, Sri Ramakrishna, while expounding to his devotees the cardinal tenets of the *Vaishnava* religion in his own room, said: "The religion enjoins upon its followers the practice of three things, viz. relish for the name of God, compassion for all living creatures and service to the *Vaishnavas,*—the devotees of the Lord." After a while in a semi-conscious mood he said to himself, "Compassion to creatures! Compassion to creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, recognizing him to be the veritable manifestation of God!" Among those who listened to the Master, there was Naren who found a special significance in these inspired utterances of Sri Ramakrishna. After coming out of the room he said to others, "What a strange light have I discovered in these wonderful words of the Master! How beautifully has he reconciled the ideal of *bhakti* with the knowledge of the *Vedanta* ... I have understood that the ideal of *Vedanta* lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practised even from hearth and home and applied to all our daily schemes of life. Whatever may be the avocation of a man, let him understand and realise that it is God alone Who has manifested Himself as the world and created beings. He is both immanent and transcendent. It is He Who has become all diverse creatures, objects of our love, respect or compassion, and yet He is beyond all these. Such realization of Divinity in humanity leaves no room for arrogance. By realizing it a man cannot have any jealousy or pity for any other being. Service of man, knowing him to be the manifestation of God, purifies the heart and, in no time, such an aspirant realizes himself as part and parcel of God—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. . . . The embodied being cannot remain even for a minute without doing any work. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God upon earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the goal. However, if it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Pariah." We all know how, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendranath (as Swami Vivekananda) translated his ideas into action and made the Ideal of Service one of the fundamental principles of the Ramakrishna Brotherhood for self-liberation as also for the well-being of humanity at large.

At Shyampukur

The health of Sri Ramakrishna began to show signs of deterioration under the severe strain put upon it by his constant discourses with the devotees and visitors. Moreover, in the middle of 1885 he developed a throat trouble (i.e. clergyman's sore throat) which ultimately developed into a fatal cancer. To prevent further aggravation, he was advised by eminent physicians not to indulge in too much talking or to go into frequent trances (*samadhi*). But these cautions proved ineffective as he could hardly restrain himself from spiritual discourses and trances which were the very breath of his life. To facilitate the treatment of Sri Ramakrishna, he was very soon removed in the early part of October, 1885, first to a small rented house at Durgacharan Mookherjee Street, Baghbazar (Calcutta). But as he did not like it, he straightway went to Balaram Babu's house at Ramakanta Bose Street, Baghbazar. Within a week (i.e. in the middle of October), he was shifted to a spacious house at Shyampukur and placed under the medical treatment of Dr. Mahendra Lall Sarkar, the then leading Homeopath of Calcutta. Narendranath and his brother disciples, viz. Sashi, Bāburam, Rakhal, Kali and others, as also the householder devotees including Girish Chandra Ghosh, Balaram Bose, Ramachandra Dutta, Mahendranath Gupta (Master-Mahashaya), Devendranath Mazumdar and the like, applied themselves whole-heartedly to the service of the Master at this critical hour. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi (the consort of Sri Ramakrishna) also came from Dakshineswar to the Shyampukur House to render unto him whatever personal service was possible for her to do under this trying situation.

The news of Sri Ramakrishna's advent in Calcutta spread like wild-fire and this place also became in no time a centre of very great attraction. Devotees in large numbers and many seekers after truth from different places began to crowd into this holy resort for spiritual guidance and enlightenment. The illness of Sri Ramakrishna thus provided an occasion for the devotees, both young and old, to bind themselves together into a holy fraternity. They all vied with one another to mould their lives in the light of the lofty spiritual ideals set before them by the great Master.

Narendranath soon noticed that a group of young disciples had begun to imitate the spiritual ecstasies of the Master in the course of devotional music. They would weep and dance and fall into partial trances accompanied by physical contortions, etc. It did not take much time for the level-headed and keen-eyed Narendranath to discern that this frequent outburst of emotion in the case of many was neither attended by a corresponding transformation of character nor based on discrimination, stern austerity, self-control and uncompromising renunciation which formed the very core of the spiritual life and realization of the Master. Anticipating the danger of a physical and mental breakdown due to such frothy sentimentalism, Narendranath took up the task of toning them up at leisure hours by means of songs and discourses instinct with the ideas of renunciation and sincere devotion, and also by holding before them the glowing pictures of the Master's long-drawn *sadhana* and spirit of dispassion for the ephemeral objects of the world. Thus Narendranath, though engaged in his own spiritual pursuits, eventually succeeded in canalizing the emotions of his brother disciples in the right direction and in strengthening the bond of spiritual fellowship among themselves in the course of their devoted service to the Master. But, as days rolled on, the condition of the Master went from bad to worse and the best available medical treatment proved futile in arresting the rapid aggravation of the fatal disease. Seeing the worsening condition of Sri Ramakrishna's health, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar suggested his immediate removal from the foul and congested air of the locality to some other place where he would be able to breathe a fresh and pure atmosphere. Accordingly the Master was removed for better treatment to the rented garden-house of Sri Gopal Chandra Ghosh at Cossipore on the afternoon of the 11th December, 1885. Sri Ramakrishna felt himself quite at home in that beautiful garden-house which was free from the dirt and the nerve-racking noise of the town.

At the Cossipore Garden

Sri Ramakrishna—the Seraphic Soul—was never so brilliant and aggressive in his spiritual ministry as he was now. Like the mellowed glow of the setting sun that brightens up into a crimson beauty just before its final plunge into the immensity of the western horizon, the serene spiritual light of the life of the great Master similarly flamed into an effulgent halo immediately before his passing away. Though extremely emaciated and physically broken down, Sri Ramakrishna gave out his best to the most intimate circle of his disciples and devotees during the closing days of his life at Cossipore so as to make them fit instruments for the propagation of his message in the world. He singled out his beloved Naren as the head of the group as he discerned in him all those bright traits of spiritual leadership needed to weld the heterogeneous elements of young boys into a homogeneous spiritual brotherhood. Sri Ramakrishna once commissioned Naren to look after the young disciples and to see that they carried on spiritual practices and did not return home after his passing away. Naren, whose personality was like a blazing fire, welcomed this mandate as a sacred task and spared no pains to kindle in them an undying yearning for the achievement of the highest end of human existence through study, music, conversations and enlightened discussions on the divine qualities of their Master's character.

As days glided on without bringing even a modicum of relief to the Master's physical sufferings, Narendranath got alarmed that the dearest one of his heart might one day bid adieu to all, leaving them behind like a rudderless ship drifting to and fro in this uncharted ocean of life. He grew restless and impatient. Being unable to control his feeling, one chilly night Narendranath walked into the garden in the company of some of his *gurubhais* (brother-disciples), sat under the star-lit canopy of heaven and, collecting dry leaves and twigs together, set fire to them. With a mind full of intense *vairagyam* (dispassion), Narendranath began to dwell on the manifold realizations of the Master, and impressed upon them the urgent need of renouncing everything and striving their level best for the achievement of the noblest objective of their lives before the Master quitted the mortal coil. In a highly inspired mood, Naren told them that it was at such a silent hour of the night that the monks lighted their *dhuni* fire, carried on meditation and burnt their desires which were the sources of all miseries and bondage on earth. Inspired by these illuminating talks, they felt that they were actually making an oblation of their sordid desires into the sacred fire and were getting purified.

Though a great spiritual unrest was raging within, Narendranath outwardly maintained a calm sangfroid with his characteristic fortitude and self-control even in the midst of the manifold depressing conditions of life, and stood firm and unshaken like a veritable rock to inspire courage and confidence in the young disciples who had been committed to his charge by the Master. But as the end of the Master drew much nearer, his mental agony and disquiet increased thousandfold and his inner self became a veritable cauldron of bubbling spiritual discontent. Knowing his mental condition, Sri Ramakrishna could no longer keep the desire of his beloved Naren unfulfilled. His insistent appeal for that blessed realization which resulted from the *nirvikalpa samadhi* at long last attained to fruition. One evening, unexpectedly, the mind of Naren soared high up into the indefinable stillness of the Absolute wherein space vanishes into nothingness, time is swallowed up in eternity and causation becomes a dream of the past,—a state in which the knowledge, knower and known become one indivisible consciousness, and the self, shattering the prison of matter, merges in the infinite glory of *Brahman*. At about 9 o'clock at night Naren returned to normal consciousness but his heart was still filled to overflowing with ineffable ecstasy. After a while when Naren prostrated himself before Shri Ramakrishna, he tenderly said to him, "Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realization you have just had lie locked up and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you will have finished my work, the treasure box will be unlocked again, and you will know everything then just as you do now." Afterwards the Master said to the other disciples that the moment Naren would realize who he was, he would pass away of his own will. The time also was not far when he would shake the world to its foundations through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers. The readers would see how the subsequent events of the life of Narendranath proved the truth of the prophetic utterance of the great Master regarding the future glorious destiny of his beloved disciple.

In various ways Sri Ramakrishna was preparing Naren to be the head of the young group of the would-be apostles who were to consecrate their lives very soon to carry out his mission on this earth. One day the Master sent out the boys to beg food from door to door (i.e. for *madhukari bhiksha*) with a view to training them in the prospective monastic life. On another day he distributed ochre cloths and *rudraksha* beads to them, made them go through a religious ceremony and thus sowed in the soil of Bengal the seed of the future Ramakrishna Order, which was to grow and develop into a powerful religious organization. Knowing that his end was imminent, the Master, in order to endow Naren with the spiritual wealth which he himself had acquired after years of superhuman efforts and unprecedented austerities, called him to his side only three or four days before his *mahasamadhi*. Having seated him in front and looking intently into the eyes of his dear disciple, he fell into a deep trance. Naren felt the powerful impact of a tremendous force passing into his own body and soon lost all body-consciousness. When, after a while, Naren came to himself, the Master was found shedding tears. When interrogated, Sri Ramakrishna softly replied, "Oh Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a *fakir* (beggar).... By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that, will you go to whence you came."

Another incident of deep spiritual significance also occurred only a couple of days before the final deliverance of the Master. Standing by the bedside of Sri Ramakrishna, Naren thought that he would accept him as an Incarnation of God if he could declare in the midst of this excruciating physical suffering that he was God incarnate. Scarcely had this idea flashed across his mind when the Master distinctly said, "O my Naren, are you not yet convinced? He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body,—but not from the standpoint of your *Vedanta.*" Naren was extremely abashed and stung with self-reproach to think that he still doubted the Master even after so much experiment and revelation.

The Master had now the satisfaction of seeing his young disciples united under the leadership of Narendranath into a spiritual fraternity with one common resolve to dedicate themselves to the service of humanity, and peacefully entered into *mahasamadhi* on August 16, 1886.

In the Baranagar Monastery

The grief of the young disciples as also of the household devotees knew no bounds at the passing away of their beloved Master. But they did not lose heart even in this most tragic situation. A ray of light was soon discernible on the horizon when Surendranath Mitra, a staunch lay-disciple of the Master, came forward unexpectedly at this hour of trial with a proposal to rent an old dilapidated house at Baranagore to provide shelter for those blessed souls who had already renounced their hearth and home for the sake of the Master, and also to create an opening for the householder devotees to occasionally come there for spiritual inspiration and guidance. The suggestion of Surendranath was hailed with enthusiasm by all and the portion of the sacred relics of the Master which Narendranath and his *gurubhais* had preserved with so much care in an urn was soon enshrined in that house for daily ceremonial worship. Moreover, all the articles that were used by Sri Ramakrishna in the Cossipore garden were soon removed to this new habitat and preserved with great care as sacred mementos of the Master. Though some of the young disciples had by this time gone back to their respective homes under the pressure of circumstances over which they had no control, Narendranath, by dint of his personal magnetism and whirlwind of enthusiasm, succeeded in rallying them together at the newly started monastery. The whole place throbbed in no time with an unprecedented vivacity and spiritual power. The fire of enthusiasm thus kindled in them and constantly fed by their ever-deepening yearning for the realization of the Truth as also by their whole-souled earnestness for the fulfilment of the mission of their Master, spurred them on to face the travail of a new birth and meet the challenges of internal and external nature with indomitable courage and confidence.

A very significant incident occurred a few days after their coming to the Baranagore monastery. Invited by the mother of Baburam, Naren and some of his brother-disciples went to Antpur and lived there for some time. During this period Naren kept them all spell-bound by his devotional songs and soul-enthralling discourses on the thrilling tales of the Master's life of renunciation and sacrifice. As a result, their monastic idealism received an added momentum in the silent atmosphere of this rural home, and they inwardly felt themselves knit together into one single body. One night in the chilly month of December in 1886, they lighted the *dhuni*-fire and sitting beside it, got so much inspired to hear from their beloved Naren the wonderful story of Lord Jesus who had laid down his life for the redemption of the world, that they became totally oblivious of time and place and took the vow of leading a life of renunciation for the realization of God. It was afterwards discovered that it was Christmas Eve, and they inferred that this might be one of the reasons why such an apostolic fervour so suddenly gripped their thought on that night and the atmosphere became so surcharged with the holy spirit of Lord Jesus.

Some time during this period they performed the sacred *viraja homa** at the Baranagore monastery and formally took the vows of lifelong celibacy and poverty. The old names were discarded and new ones§ were assumed to complete their severance from the former ways of life. Narendranath who changed his name several times, finally took the name of Swami Vivekananda according to the suggestion of his own disciple, the Maharaja of Khetri, a few days before his starting for the West.

The life of severest spiritual austerities lived, the hardship and direst poverty endured and the

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* A sacred ceremony which is gone through on the occasion of taking the vow of monastic life.

§1.	Rakhal Chandra Ghosh ..	Swami Brahmananda
2.	Gopal Sur (Senior) ..	Swami Advaitananda
3.	Latu	Swami Abdhutananda
4.	Taraknath Ghosal ..	Swami Shivananda
5.	Baburam Ghosh ..	Swami Premananda
6.	Nityaniranjan Ghosh ..	Swami Niranjanananda
7.	Yogindranath Roy Chowdhury	Swami Yogananda
8.	Sarat Chandra Chakravorty	Swami Saradananda
9.	Sashibhusan Chakravorty ..	Swami Ramakrishnananda
10.	Harinath Chattopadhyay ..	Swami Turiyananda
11.	Sri Gangadhar Ghatak ..	Swami Akhandananda
12.	Kaliprasad Chandra ..	Swami Abhedananda
13.	Subodh Chandra Ghosh ..	Swami Subodhananda
14.	Saradaprasanna Mitra ..	Swami Trigunatitananda
15.	Hariprasanna Chatterjee ..	Swami Vijnanananda,—and so on.

spirit of unique self-denial exhibited in the Baranagore monastery by this heroic band of Sannyasins form a thrilling episode in the history of the Ramakrishna movement. Swamiji himself in a reminiscent mood once spoke to a disciple: "There were days at the Baranagore Math when we had nothing to eat. If there was rice, salt was lacking. Some days, that was all we had, but nobody cared. Leaves of the *bimba* creeper boiled, salt and rice—this was our diet for months! Come what would, we were indifferent. We were being carried on in a strong tide of religious practices and meditation. Oh, what days! Demons would have run away at the sight of such austerities, to say nothing of men!"[5] Romain Rolland gives a glimpse of the significant role Swamiji himself played at the Baranagar Math: "He (Naren) kept its members ever on the alert, he harried their minds without pity: he read them the great books of human thought, he explained to them the evolution of the universal mind, he forced them to dry and impassioned discussion of all the great philosophical and religious problems, he led them indefatigably towards the wide horizons of boundless truth, which surpass all limits of schools and races, and embrace and unify all particular truths. This synthesis of spirit achieved the promise of Sri Ramakrishna's message of love. The unseen Master presided over their meetings. They were able to place their intellectual labours at the service of his universal heart."[6]

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Call of the Forest

The more these young apostles of the New Dispensation intensified their spiritual austerities within the four walls of their newly started monastery at Baranagar, the more they began to feel from within a stirring call to break all barriers to taste the freedom of the open and the silence of the high hills. The holy precincts of the Math appeared to them to be too small to accommodate their ever-expanding vision and to satisfy their deepening spiritual urge to be in constant communion with God. One by one, they left the monastery and some lost themselves in the immensity of the outside world,—some in the interior of the heaven-kissing Himalayas, and others in the solitude of the dense forests, according as their temperaments guided them to satisfy the migratory tendencies of their soul. Even Swami Vivekananda, who felt it to be his sacred duty to remain there to consolidate the monastic life of the nascent Order, was himself tormented soon with an irresistible desire to cut himself free from the narrow bounds of the monastery at Baranagore and to strike out into the unknown paths of itinerant monks under the wide canopy of heaven, not only to test his own strength and gather experiences of a new life but also to allow latitude to his brother monks to develop a spirit of self-help and self-reliance. It was only Swami Ramakrishnananda who overcame this sacred madness to escape, and, like a guardian angel, kept vigil over there with unflinching tenacity during this period of constant flux and fusion of ideas.

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[6] *Ibid.*; Vol. II., p. 12.

Swami Vivekananda however resisted the call to flight for two years in the interest of the Order and, apart from his flying visits to Vaidyanath, Simultala, Varanasi and some other neighbouring places, he did not stir out during this trying period. But in 1888, prompted by an irresistible desire, he all on a sudden proceeded towards the Himalayas, visiting on the way the notable religious and historical places like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Lakhnau, Agra and Vrindaban. A very significant phenomenon occurred at the Railway Station at Hathras where Sri Sarat Chandra Gupta, the station master, at the very sight of Swamiji, became magnetized by the aura of spirituality radiating from the pair of his lovely eyes and handsome features, and, with an incredible alacrity, accepted him as his spiritual preceptor and followed him to the hills with a begging bowl in hand! Both the *guru* and the new disciple who afterwards became known in the Ramakrishna Order as Swami Sadananda, trekked into the bosom of the Himalayas to appease their spiritual hunger and practised severest of austerities for months on end in this sacred sanctuary of gods and goddesses. But these physical hardships coupled with the malignant fever and the severe climate of the hill told so seriously upon their health that they were compelled to return to Baranagore. The venturesome spiritual quest of the young sojourner did not, however, go in vain. "This very first journey had brought ancient India vividly before his eyes,—eternal India,—the India of the Vedas, with its race of heroes and gods, clothed in the glory of legend and history, Aryans, Moghuls and Dravidians—all one. At the first impact he realized the spiritual unity of India and Asia and he communicated this discovery to the brethren of Baranagore".[7]

At Ghazipur, in the course of his second journey in 1889, Swamiji came into intimate contact with the illustrious saint Pavhari Baba, whom he held in high respect for his *yogic* powers and extreme form of self-denial. Though he had to come back to the monastery very soon this time also, every such sporadic pilgrimage indubitably brought in its wake a fund of new ideas and experience to him. But his mind still pined for penetrating again into the depths of the snow-clad Himalayas to equip himself, by means of meditation and mental discipline, with a tremendous spiritual power to carry on his Master's work without let or hindrance. With this end in view he again set out on his pilgrimage to the Himalayas in July

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[7] Rolland, Romain. *Life of Vivekananda*, 2nd Edn., Vol. II., p. 18.

1890, telling his *gurubhais,* "I shall not return until I acquire such realization, that my very touch will transform a man." Before starting for the journey, he went to Ghushuree, a village across the Ganges, to meet the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and received her hearty blessing for the success of his mission. At Varanasi he stayed a few days with his friend Sri Pramadadas Mitra, a highly erudite Sanskrit scholar. While taking leave of him, Swamiji said, "I am going away; but I shall never come back until I can burst on society like a bomb, and make it follow me like a dog." Swami Akhandananda, one of his *gurubhais,* who had just returned from his Tibetan tour with a thrilling experience of the life and tradition of the land of the Lamas, and was familiar with the intricacies of the mountainous tracts, was now his sole companion in this most arduous sojourn in the bosom of the Himalayas—the matrix of Indian thought and culture.

The invigorating air, the beautiful waterfalls, the roaring rivers rushing with foamy fury through myriads of boulders, the flora and fauna of the vales and dales, the warbling birds and flowering plants, the snowy peaks of the Himalayas and, above all, the sublime grandeur and the mystic silence of the scene—all filled the great Swami with a rapturous joy rarely to be experienced amidst the din and bustle of a work-a-day world. Whether at Almora, a beauty-spot in the heart of the Himalayas, or in a lonely cottage in the company of his brother-monk Swami Turiyananda by the bank of the holy Alakananda at Srinagar, whether at Tehri or Rajpur, at Hardwar or Rishikesh, the holy seat of saints and sages,—everywhere the Swami put himself into the treadmill of hard spiritual discipline to get ready for the great task ahead. But they had to give up their long-cherished project to visit the sanctuaries of Kedarnath and Badrinath—the abodes, respectively, of Lord Shiva and Bishnu—as the road leading to these sacred places of pilgrimage was closed by the Government due to a virulent outbreak of famine in and around the area.

Historic Tour and Discovery of India

A grim struggle had so long been raging within the great Swami between the two apparently conflicting forces—one to dive into the bottomless depth of the ocean of Reality to pick up gems of supreme spiritual wisdom, and the other to jump into the fray of life to mitigate the untold miseries of the inarticulate millions and to liquidate the illiteracy and untouchability that were eating into the vitals of the race. The latter ideal now loomed so large before his vision that he determined to snap the golden ties of love and affection of his monastic brothers, and plunge into the trackless ocean of India to do the bidding of the Master. With this lofty objective, he left Delhi in February, 1891, where he had come from Meerut, and began his historic itineracy of two years through the vast expanse of his motherland. "He wandered free from plan, caste, home, constantly alone with God. And there was no single hour of his life when he was not brought into contact with the sorrows, the desires, the abuses and feverishness of living men, rich and poor, in town and field; he became one with their lives; the great Book of Life revealed to him what all the books in the libraries could not have done, . . . the tragic face of the present day, the God struggling in humanity, the cry of the people of India and of the world for help and the heroic duty of the new Oedipus, whose task it was to deliver Thebes from the talons of the Sphinx or to perish with Thebes."[8]

This memorable sojourn, replete as it was with many a thrilling incident and experience, was significant in a variety of ways. Occasions were not wanting when this wandering monk with a staff and a begging bowl in hand, met and conversed on equal terms with Rajas and Maharajas and persons of high position and pedigree, and taught them their duties and responsibilities towards the ignorant and indigent masses wallowing in the mud-puddle of superstition, and also when he identified himself in keen sympathy with the crushing poverty of the despised Pariahs and learnt lessons of highest wisdom from the lowliest and the lost. While at Alwar as a guest of Pandit

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Sambhunathji, a retired Engineer of the State, the Swami became the centre of very great attraction. Hindus, Muslims and Christians,—people belonging to the different strata of society,—began to crowd into the place from day to day. They were struck with the profound scholarship and catholicity of this Hindu monk and were inspired to listen, with reverence, to his illuminating discourses and topics covering almost all the phases of human thought from the ancient times to the present day. Very soon Major Ramchandraji, the Dewan of the Maharaja of Alwar, came to know of the presence of Swamiji in the State and extended a cordial invitation to him, to which he gladly responded. The Dewan who was highly religious-minded, wanted that the Maharaja Mangal Singh, who had become very much Anglicised, should be brought under the benign influence of the dynamic personality of such a learned monk so that he might turn over a new leaf. At the request of the Dewan, Prince Mangal Singh came to his house and sat in front of the Swami with all respect and humility. In the course of the interesting conversation that followed, the Prince in a semi-jocular vein said, "Well, Babaji Maharaj, I have no faith in idol worship. What is going to be my fate? I cannot worship wood, earth, stone, or metal like other people. Does this mean that I shall fare worse in the life hereafter?" Swamiji looked around and found a picture of the Maharaja hanging on the wall. Without a moment's hesitation Swamiji asked the Dewan to bring the picture down and give it to him. Getting the picture in his hand, Swamiji asked the Dewan to spit on it. The Dewan who held the Maharaja in high esteem, could hardly persuade himself to comply with the preposterous request of the Swami who repeated it several times. The whole audience was dumbfounded, and awe-struck to hear such a peremptory order of the Swami. The Dewan cried out in bewilderment, "What! Swamiji? What are you asking me to do? This is the likeness of our Maharaja! How can I do such a thing?" "Be it so," said the Swami, "but the Maharaja is not bodily present in this photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It does not contain his bones and flesh and blood. It does not speak or behave or move in any way as does the Maharaja. And yet all of you refuse to spit upon it, because you see in the photo the shadow of the Maharaja's form. Indeed, in spitting upon the photo, you feel that you insult your master, the Prince himself." Turning to the Maharaja he continued, "See, your Highness, though this is not you in one sense, in another sense it is you. That was why your devoted servants were so perplexed when I asked them to spit on it. It has a shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. One glance at it makes them see you in it. Therefore they look upon it with as much respect as they do upon your own person. Thus it is with the devotees who worship stone and metal images of gods and goddesses. It is because an image brings to their minds their *Ishta,* or some special form and attributes of the Divinity, and helps them to concentrate, that the devotees worship God in an image. They do not worship the stone or the metal as such. Everyone is worshipping, O Maharaja, the same one God who is the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of pure knowledge. And God appears to all even according to their understanding and their representation of Him." Mangal Singh, who was so long listening spell-bound to the wonderful exposition of the real import of image-worship, was overwhelmed with emotion and apologetically spoke to the Swami with folded hands, "Swamiji! I must admit that according to the light you have thrown upon image-worship, I have never yet met anyone who has worshipped stone, or wood, or metal. Heretofore I did not understand its meaning! You have opened my eyes! But what will be my fate? Have mercy on me." The Swami answered, "O Prince, none but God can be merciful to one, and He is ever-merciful! Pray to Him. He will show His mercy unto you."

Instances of this nature can be multiplied to show how during the tour this heroic monk of India, with his characteristic frankness and boldness, taught men of light and leading what he considered to be true and proper and thereby brought about a complete change in their mental make-up and intellectual outlook. But this intellectual daring and conquest notwithstanding, there were occasions when the Swami had the humility and nobleness to learn lessons of highest wisdom even from the most despised member of the society. Once when Swamiji was staying near Jaipur with his initiated disciple, the Maharaja of Khetri, he was invited by the Maharaja to a musical entertainment provided by a dancing girl. But the monastic instinct of the Swami was too strong to yield to the insistent request of his dear disciple. When the news of Swamiji's refusal to join the party was heard by the girl, she was cut to the quick and, in the agony of her heart, she immediately burst into the highly instructive song of the Vaishnava Saint Surdas to teach, as it were, a great lesson to the great Sannyasin:

"O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!
Thy name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness.
One piece of iron is in the image in the temple,
And another is the knife in the hand of the butcher;
But when they touch the philosopher's stone,
Both alike turn to gold,
So, Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!
Thy name, Lord, is Same-sightedness.
One drop of water is in the sacred Jumna,
And another is foul in the ditch by the roadside;
But when they fall into the the Ganges
Both alike become holy.
So, Lord, do not look upon my evil qualities
Thy name, Lord, is Same-sightedness."

Swamiji, an Advaitist *par excellence,* who was staying at a little distance in a separate tent, became so much overwhelmed with the emotional appeal of the song sung by the girl with deep fervour, that he could no longer resist the request. The meaningful song instantly reminded him that the Divinity knows no distinction of caste, creed, colour or sex. He dwells equally in the high and the low, in the pure and the impure, in the rich and the poor. He is Sameness everywhere. Referring to this instructive experience later, the Swami said, "That incident removed the scales from my eyes. Seeing that all are indeed the manifestations of the One, I could no longer condemn anybody."

In the course of his epoch-making *wanderjahre* (years of travel) which led him through the various historic and religious places of Rajputana, the land of heroes and heroines, Gujrat, Bombay, Mysore, Malabar and Madura, up to the temple of Rameswar, the Varanasi of Southern India, and farther beyond to Kanya Kumari, the southernmost sanctuary of the Great Goddess, he availed himself of every opportunity not only to keenly watch and study the life and condition of India but also to enrich his stock of knowledge in Sanskrit by mastering the *Mahabhashya* (the great commentary of Patanjali on the *Sutras* of Panini) —sometimes from a distinguished grammarian of Jaipur, sometimes from Pandit Narayandas, the then most renowned Sanskrit scholar residing in the court of the Maharaja of Khetri, and sometimes from Pandit Shankar Pandurang, an illustrious Vedic scholar in the State of Porbandar. As a matter of fact, this intimate acquaintance of the Swami with the intricacies and peculiarities of Sanskrit grammar enabled him to thoroughly understand the *Brahma-Sutra* and other abstruse Vedantic treatises and to hold enlightened discussion at ease with the reputed Sanskrit savants of the time whenever situation demanded it. Once in the presence of His Holiness Jagatguru Sri Sankaracharya of the Gobardhan Math, a conference of learned Pandits was convened in the court of the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi, and Swamiji, who was also invited to participate in it, acquitted himself most creditably in the discussion and earned the love and blessings of His Holiness. At another time when the Swami went to Mysore and was introduced to His Highness the Maharaja Sri Chamarajendra Wadiyar by his Dewan Sir Seshadri Iyer, the Maharaja in the course of the the talk was so much struck with the Swami's brilliance of thought, charm of personality, depth of learning and penetrating religious insight that he used to seek his salutary advice on many important matters even though the Swami with his usual straightforwardness did not hesitate to point out to His Highness the drawbacks that generally came to his notice. During his stay in Mysore the Swami was once requested to be present in a great assembly of Pandits held in the Palace-hall and to participate in the discussion on some intricate points of the *Vedanta* philosophy. When the Pandits failed to arrive at a definite decision on a subtle controversial issue, it was Swamiji who, with his deep spiritual insight, intellectual acumen and profound knowledge of the *Vedanta* philosophy, dealt with the subject in a masterly way and in a telling language, and quickly brought the stormy wrangling of the Pandits to a happy end.

At Trivandrum, Swamiji was the guest of the learned Professor Sri Sundarama Iyer, tutor to the nephew of the Maharaja of Travancore. There he came in contact with a distinguished scholar named Sri Rangachariar of Madras, then Professor of Chemistry at the Maharaja's College. Both the savants were so deeply impressed by the versatility of the genius of Swamiji and also by the sublimity and simplicity of his personality that they spent hour after hour in illuminating conversation with him on a variety of subjects ranging from the highest metaphysical flights of the *Vedanta* philosophy to modern Kant and Hegel, from the splendid achievements of Science to the glories of art and music, both ancient and modern, and from the sublimities of ancient *Yoga* to the complex problems of education and sociology, and they were amazed and enraptured by the vast range of his mental horizon. Prof. S. Iyer, while paying an eloquent and respectful tribute to the Swami in his personal reminiscences, says:

"During all the time he stayed, he took captive every heart within the home. To everyone of us he was all sweetness, all tenderness, all grace. My sons were frequently in his company, and one of them still swears by him and has the most vivid and endearing recollections of his visit and of his stirring personality . . . When he left, it seemed for a time as if the light had gone out of our home." On his way to the holy city of Rameswaram, the Varanasi of Southern India, the Swami met at Madura the Raja of Ramnad, Bhaskar Setupati, who was one of the most enlightened princes of the time in India. Attracted by his charming personality, profound erudition and depth of spiritual wisdom, the Raja became his devoted disciple and dedicated his life to the service of the people of his State.

Vision of a New India

Thus the great Swami gathered manifold experiences not only for his own benefit and enlightenment but also as a preparation for the fulfilment of the lofty mission of the Master in a manner befitting the magnitude of the task ahead. During the two years of his eventful pilgrimage from the dreamy poetic regions of the snow-capped Himalayas down to Kanyakumari, the southernmost extremity of India, his body and mind did not know any rest; he suffered from extreme privation, hunger and thirst, from inconceivable affront and indignity, and also faced innumerable trials and tribulations and sometimes endangered his life. But through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna he emerged from the fiery ordeal with a more expanded heart, broader vision and richer experience. Reaching the sacred sanctuary of the Goddess Kanyakumari, the Swami offered his whole-souled worship to the Divine Mother and was filled with an ecstasy of celestial bliss. But the raging tempest of his heart that made him bid adieu to his hearth and home and traverse the vast expanse of India barefooted for years together as a penniless pilgrim with a begging bowl and a staff in hand did not die down there. Though jaded and tired, he flung himself into the rolling deep, swam across the narrow strait to a small piece of stone rising above the swelling sea at a little distance from the shore, and sitting motionless on the last stone of India, soon plunged into the silence of the soul in profound meditation of his motherland.

It was indeed a red-letter day for India; for in the dim twilight of evening he had a vivid glimpse of the glories of the past and the tragedies of the present, and discovered the wonderful oneness of thought and culture underlying the colourful multiplicity of her races and creeds, castes and customs, and her ideals and traditions. But the lurid picture of the present tragedies silhouetted on the background of her glorious past brought painful thoughts to his mind. Tears rolled down the cheeks of this heroic monk to contemplate how India, once a land of plenty and profusion—a veritable El Dorado, had become one of the poorest countries in the world by a mysterious combination of circumstances; how most of the villages had become the veritable dens of jackals and hyenas, a creeping paralysis had spread over almost every limb of her rural system, and thousands of her children were dying of want and diseases. Blood pounded in his ears like the sea at his feet to recall the tragic phenomenon that the once bold and industrious peasantry that peopled the smiling and peaceful villages of ancient and medieval India, and the skilled artisans who in towns carried their various manufactures into a state of perfection and exported the industrial products to the different countries of the East and the West, had become utterly emasculated, lifeless and almost extinct due to an organised process of exploitation and vandalism in the course of less than 150 years of foreign rule. A mute appeal rising all around him from the oppressed soul of India, the tragic contrast between the august grandeur of her ancient might and the sordid degradation of the country brought about by her children devoured his heart. But he discerned through his spiritual vision a silver lining of hope on the horizon even in the midst of this gathering gloom of despair. For he felt that the country, though fallen and degraded, still possessed the vitality and strength to rise once again to its pristine position of glory and freedom. In the medley of thoughts that crowded to his mind, he did not count upon the Rajas and Maharajas who were buried deep in the downy bed of luxuries and were deaf to the pitiful cry of the hungry and suppressed millions of the land, but upon those sturdy young men and women who, fired with the zeal of holiness, imbued with a spirit of renunciation and service—the twin ideals of India,—fortified with eternal faith in the Lord and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen, would march ahead with healthy minds, full of the reverence for the 'glory that was Ind', full of the appreciation of the realities of the present, and pulsating with hopes for the future.

He realized that the best way to awaken the self-forgetful Indians to the consciousness of their infinite possibilities and to open their eyes to the richness of their own cultural heritage was to spread the light of education among the grovelling masses from one end of the country to the other. And the education to be rendered fruitful and effective must not be limited to the knowledge of religious truths alone but should be comprehensive enough to embrace all aspects of human culture both secular and spiritual.

It further dawned on him that it would be suicidal if the Indians raised a war-cry against everything foreign inasmuch as no nation could live a life of self-sufficient exclusiveness without spelling disaster to itself. The world was fast moving towards a synthesis of ideas and ideals and the life of every race or nation was bound to be interlinked with that of the rest of the world. The only course left to the Indians was to incorporate the best elements of Western civilization into the texture of their own thought and culture. The Orient would really be benefitted by a somewhat greater activity and energy of the West, as the latter would profit by an admixture of Eastern introspection and meditative habit. Science coupled with *Vedanta* was the ideal of the future humanity. A great seer, Swami Vivekananda visualized the evolution of a new civilization in which the various types of cultures would be harmoniously blended and still would have adequate scope for full play and development.

The vision of a new India maddened the Swami in these moments of meditation and he woke up from his reverie with a grim resolve to go to the West to carry the universal message of the Master and to get back in exchange the material resources for feeding the hungry mouths of his own moribund race so as to make them physically fit for the struggle of life. He took the sacred vow that 'he would throw away even the bliss of the *nirvikalpa samadhi* for the liberation of his fellowmen in India and abroad'. Thus was revealed to him by the spirit of the Master the Vision of a New India—the fruition of the deep meditations of many years in one of the most luminous moments of his life.

Call from the West

The more the Swami brooded over the sad lot of the politically prostrate, economically atrophied and culturally bewildered people of India, the more strongly did he feel an inner impetus to go to the land beyond the seas to discover ways and means to mitigate the untold sufferings of his countrymen; for he remembered the significant utterance of the Master, "Religion is not for empty bellies." The famished country must first be fed and clothed and rendered physically fit to think of the subtle problems of religion and philosophy. As a matter of fact, this idea of going to the West had flashed in his mind even when he was trekking through India, and he broached it for the first time to Mr. C. H. Pandya at Junagad. It received an added momentum at Porbandar towards the end of 1891 when Pandit Shankar Pandurang, impressed by Swamiji's intellectual brilliance and breadth and originality of his views, advised him not to fritter away his energy in India but to go to the West where people would appreciate his worth much better and where he would be able to put new interpretation on Western thought and culture in the light of the universal ideals of the *Sanatan Dharma* (Eternal Religion) as reflected in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was about this time that Swamiji heard, somewhere between Junagad and Porbandar, that a Parliament of Religions would be held in 1893 at Chicago in

America. While staying at Khandwa (in the State of Indore in Central India) as a guest in the house of Sri Haridas Chatterjee, a distinguished pleader of the place, Swamiji's idea of attending the Parliament of Religions began to take shape, and he said to him: "If someone can help me with the passage money, all will be well, and I shall go." Swamiji reiterated the very same idea at Bangalore towards the end of October, 1892, in the presence of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore, when he burst forth into an eloquent description of his mission, and emphatically pointed out that India needed the modern scientific ideas of the Occident as well as a thorough organic reform, and that it was India's role and responsibility to carry to the West the treasures of her philosophical and spiritual truths. Swamiji, in the course of this discussion, again expressed his intentions to go to America to preach the gospel of the *Vedanta* to the Western nations. The proposal of the Swami was hailed with great enthusiasm by the Maharaja who promised the necessary financial help to cover all the expenses of the journey. The Swami declined to accept the generous offer for the present, as he still needed more time for mental preparation for the consummation of his desire.

Now, in the course of his meditation at Kanya Kumari, this idea matured into a sacred resolve and, swimming back to the mainland, he wended his way to Madras where he very soon attracted around him a brilliant galaxy of educated young men and made a public announcement of his intention of going to the West. In the heat of enthusiasm, his devotees and admirers immediately began to collect funds to make it possible for him to sail for the foreign land in pursuit of his noble mission. In the meantime, in response to a cordial invitation from a group of friends at Hyderabad, Swamiji went to the place and it was a pleasant surprise for him to find that about five hundred people including the most distinguished dignitaries of the court of the Nizam, both Hindu and Muhammedan, had mustered strong on the platform to accord him a magnificent reception. During the period of his stay in the State, Swamiji was once invited by the Nawab Bahadur Sir Khurshid Jah, Amiri-i-Kabir, K.C.S.I., the foremost nobleman of Hyderabad and the brother-in-law of His Highness the Nizam. He met the Nawab in the palace of the Nizam and had an enlightened discussion with him on the essential features of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Nawab Bahadur, who was noted for his religious tolerance and was the first Muhammedan to visit all the Hindu places of pilgrimage in India, was so deeply impressed by the catholicity of the views of Swamiji that, when he disclosed his desire to go to the West to preach the gospel of the Universal Religion, he readily agreed to help him in his noble venture with one thousand rupees. Swamiji however did not accept the money at the time but told him that he would ask for it when he would actually embark on his cherished mission.

After his return to Madras from Hyderabad Swamiji began to speak openly and aggressively about the Master and his mission. He soon became the centre of very great attraction and funds began to be collected from door to door by his disciples and friends whose number was daily on the increase. But the mind of Swamiji still rocked to and fro with a sense of uncertainty as to the success of the trip he was going to undertake. In such a perplexed state of mind Swamiji prayed to the Master and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi for light and guidance. Several days later, he saw in a dream that Sri Ramakrishna was walking to the waters of the ocean, beckoning him to follow. The Swami was elated with joy to see this vision which unmistakably indicated the approval of the Master in this great undertaking. All doubts and misgivings were silenced and his mind got over the nervousness that temporarily had taken possession of him. But still he would not be satisfied unless he received the blessings of the Holy Mother for the fruition of his mission. He wrote a letter to the Mother with a brief account of his plan and purpose. The Holy Mother instinctively recognized it to be the will of the Master and conveyed her heartfelt blessings to his beloved Naren in a letter full of overflowing love and affection. Thus fortified with this grace of the Holy Mother and the symbolic command of the Master in a dream to go to the West, Swamiji began to make hurried preparations for the great journey. Subsequently, after his resounding success in the Parliament of Religions, Swamiji, referring to the Holy Mother's grace, wrote to Swami Shivananda (one of his *Gurubhais*) from America in 1894: "You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without *Shakti* (Power), there is no regeneration for the world.....I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more...To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me...Please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here, as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything. Brother, before proceeding to America I wrote to Mother to bless me. Her blessing came and at one bound I cleared the ocean..."

When Swamiji had almost finished the necessary preparations to embark for America, the Maharaja of Khetri, who had just been blessed with a son through the grace of the Swami (his *Guru*), deputed his Dewan Jagamohan Lal to bring the Swami to Khetri at least for a day. Swamiji could not resist the request and went to Khetri to fulfil the earnest desire of his devoted disciple. The Maharaja prostrated himself before his *Guru*, introduced him to the assembled guests and told them his decision to visit the West to preach the doctrines of the *Sanatan Dharma.* All present were mightily delighted to hear of the noble mission of the Swami. After a few days' stay with the Maharaja at Khetri, he finally bade adieu to all after adopting the name of Swami Vivekananda at the request of his devout royal disciple.

On his way to Bombay from where he was to board the ship "Peninsular" on May 31, (1893), he unexpectedly met two of his *Gurubhais*—Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda at the Mount Abu Road Station and unburdened himself to them with a pathetic passion: "I have now travelled all over India...But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears. It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their sufferings. It is for this reason —to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India—that I am now going to America." Referring to this meeting Swami Turiyananda said later to a young monk* of the Order, "I could clearly perceive that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji—his heart was a huge cauldron in which the sufferings of mankind were being made into a healing balm. Nobody could understand Vivekananda unless he saw at least a fraction of the volcanic feelings which were in him." Accompanied by Sri Jagamohan Lal, the Swami reached Bombay where Sri Alasinga Perumal, one of Swamiji's devoted disciples, had come all the way from Madras to meet him. At long last on the appointed day—the 31st May, 1893,—the Swami, after bidding farewell to all his intimate friends and admirers and his dear motherland, embarked the ship and started on his memorable voyage from the old world to the new. "The Swami stood on the deck gazing towards the land until it faded out of sight, constantly sending his benedictions to those who loved him and whom he loved so tenderly. His eyes were filled with tears; his heart was overwhelmed with emotion. He thought of the Master, of the Holy Mother, and of his *Gurubhais*. He thought of India and her culture, of her greatness and her sufferings, of the *Rishis* and of the *Dharma*. And his heart seemed to burst with love for his native land. Slowly he was encompassed by the black waters of the ocean . . . The ship moved on its way southward to Ceylon and the Swami was alone with his thoughts and the vastness of the sea".[9]

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* Swami Jnaneswarananda.

Meeting of the East and the West

The journey of Swami Vivekananda from the old world to the new was a historic event of momentous significance in that it not only opened an avenue for the transmission of the most sublime cultural ideas and ideals of India into the wide field of Western thought, but also linked up the two hemispheres once for all with the golden tie of mutual love and respect for the evolution of a richer type of civilization for the benefit of humanity at large. The ship carrying the great cultural ambassador of the East reached Colombo in Ceylon, the stronghold of Buddhism, where he spent almost a day in visiting the city redolent of the hallowed traditions of Buddhistic culture. From Ceylon, he proceeded towards Japan, the land of the rising sun, visiting on the way Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Canton (the then capital of China). Then he went to Nagasaki, one of the cleanliest cities of Japan. From there he went by land to Yokohama, Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo, and was extremely delighted to see these industrially advanced cities of Japan. During this sojourn Swamiji found suitable opportunities to get himself acquainted with the essential characteristics of the national life and the manners and customs of the people of the Island. He was moreover greatly surprised to notice a tremendous urge amongst all for modern progress in every department of their life and culture. Great was his amazement when he saw Sanskrit manuscripts written on the walls of a Chinese monastery in Canton and Sanskrit *Mantras* inscribed on some of the temples of Japan, in old Bengali characters.[10]

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[9] *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. I., pp. 344-345.

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[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. I., pp. 351-352 & *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, 2nd Edn., p. 385.

These evidences confirmed Swamiji's hypothesis that at one time Bengali *Bhikshus* travelled to these far distant lands, carrying with them the ennobling gospels of Lord Buddha and that an intimate cultural contact existed between India and the countries of the Far East.

Swamiji, though a stranger on board, soon got reconciled to the new conditions of life that obtained there in the ship. The fresh invigorating sea-breeze, the care-free atmosphere, the deep rolling sound of foam-crested waves playing rhythmically on the blue surface of the ocean spreading out into infinity, the fleecy clouds hanging against the distant horizon and also the courteous demeanour of the Captain and other European passengers—all served to relax his mental tension and soothe his soul, and the Swami began to look forward to the day when he would have to deliver to the world the great message of the Master with all the force of conviction that was his own.

From Yokohama the ship came to Vancouver in British Columbia, wherefrom he went by train through Canada to the city of Chicago where the World's Fair—the Universal Exposition—was being held at the time. After reaching the destination, he lodged himself in a hotel for the time being. On the following day when he went out to visit the Fair, he was struck dumb with wonder to see how all the latest scientific and artistic inventions of the entire world had been brought into a focus in that well-arranged and gorgeously decorated Exhibition. A keen and shrewd observer, Swami Vivekananda, while marvelling at the tremendous energy displayed by this panorama of exhibits, was able at the same time to gather useful experience about the inventive genius of the people of the West. But all his exhilaration was chilled almost to the freezing point when he came to learn from the Information Bureau of the Exposition that the proposed Parliament of Religions would not be held until after the first week of September, that no one would be allowed to attend it as a delegate without official references, and that the time for the registration of delegates had already gone by. Nothing could be more stunning and disconcerting than this piece of unwelcome information which he had just received from the Bureau. His heart sank within him as he did not come there as a representative of a recognized organization. It was then only the middle of July[11] and he would have still to wait for about two months more depending on his slender purse which was also being quickly exhausted.

But Swamiji was made of a different stuff. He was not the person to truckle to the adverse forces of life and to give up the noble mission to fulfil which he had come from afar to this distant land of America. Looking up to God as his sole guide, and believing in His infinite grace he girded up his loins and started for Boston (in Massachusetts) where living was less expensive than at Chicago. Mysterious are the ways of Providence. It was a sheer fluke that in the train bound for Boston, his prepossessing and handsome appearance and charming conversation soon attracted the attention of a rich lady who invited him to her farm called "Breezy Meadows" in Metcalf (in Massachusetts). Her name was Miss Kate Sanborn. During the period of his stay in the fashionable house of his obliging hostess many distinguished persons called on the Swami and had interesting discussion with him on a variety of subjects. At this time Mr. J. H. Wright, Professor of Greek in the Harvard University, was living at Annisquam (Mass.), a small resort village on the Atlantic seaboard. Coming to hear much about the Swami from the members of the family of Miss Sanborn, he invited him to spend the week-end at his place. Nothing but Providential dispensation could effect such a happy meeting between the two great geniuses of the East and the West. Swamiji promptly responded to this esteemed invitation from a reputed scholar. Prof. Wright was so deeply impressed with the profoundity of scholarship and the versatility of genius of this Hindu monk that he himself insisted that he should represent Hinduism in the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji explained the peculiar difficulties that stood in his way in the fulfilment of this object, and said that he did not possess any credentials whereby to introduce himself to the organizers of the Parliament. Prof. Wright, who had already discovered the sparkling intelligence and the rare ability of the Swami, said, "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the Sun to state its right to shine". Prof. Wright, who was well known to the elite of the city of Chicago and also to many distinguished personages connected with the Parliament, wrote at once to his friend, the Chairman of the Committee on the Selection of Delegates, stating, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." Moreover, he gave letters of introduction to the Committee which had the responsibility of providing accommodation for Oriental delegates. Knowing that the Swami was short of funds, he himself purchased a ticket for him to enable him to go to Chicago. The joy of the Swami knew no bounds to see this literal manifestation of the grace of the Master at this most dismal hour of his life.

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[11] *Life of Swami Vivekananda,* Mayavati 2nd Edn., Vol. I., p. 357.

Thus through the generous help of Prof. Wright, Swamiji came back to Chicago. But immediately after alighting from the train he discovered to his dismay that he had lost the address of the Committee. He was in great bewilderment as he could not ascertain what he should do under this most baffling situation. It was the chilly month of September and the night was fast approaching, and, to add to his misery, it was also snowing heavily. Besides, none did even deign to talk with a coloured man, far less answer his anxious queries about the whereabouts of a hotel. Extremely hungry and physically exhausted, the Swami, who was to take the world by storm very soon in the Parliament of Religions, had no other alternative than to take shelter for the night without food in a big empty packing box in the railroad freight-yard, wherein he passed the night. When the day dawned, he got out of the packing box and, like a true Indian monk, started begging for food from door to door to satisfy his hunger. But everywhere he was hooted and insulted, and doors were slammed in his face in that land of plenty and profusion. Nothing depressed, Swamiji forged ahead, relying entirely on the Will of God; for he fully believed that the Lord (his Master) must show him the light even in the midst of this deepening darkness. Being unable to move any longer due to sheer physical exhaustion, the Swami sat down quietly on the roadside anxiously waiting for guidance from Above. All on a sudden one regal looking lady stepped down from the magnificent residence standing opposite to where Swamiji was seated, and asked him in a most tender voice whether he was a delegate to the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji answered in the affirmative and recounted his difficulties in the matter. She immediately took him to her house and entertained him with food and drink and assured him all possible help to facilitate his participation in the Parliament. From that very moment his benign hostess, Mrs. George W. Hale, her husband and their children became his most intimate friends. This unforeseen deliverance from this embarrassing and distressing predicament all the more strengthened his conviction that it was the Master who was testing his loyalty to him at every step and guiding him through thick and thin towards the glorious fruition of the sacred purpose for which he had journeyed to this alien land. Even while in India, Swamiji had the presentiment that it was all his Master's play in the cosmic drama of human life, and that a great stage was being prepared to bring him before the world as an exponent of Hindu thought and culture. Before embarking for America, he once said to Swami Turiyananda: "The Parliament is being organised for this (pointing to himself). My mind tells me so. You will see it materialised at no distant date". This prophecy of the Swami was now going to be fulfilled at long last through divine dispensation. Accompanied by Mrs. Hale, the Swami went to the office of the Parliament and delivered his credentials. He was immediately accepted as a delegate and comfortably accommodated with the other Oriental delegates. Swamiji lost no time in picking up acquaintance with many distinguished personages who had come to attend the Parliament, and moved freely in the grand circle of ecclesiastics and other dignitaries who walked to and fro in the World Fair.

In the Parliament of Religions

The Parliament of Religions opened on Monday, the 11th September, 1893 at 10 a.m. in the great Hall of Columbus at the Art Institute at Chicago simultaneously with the ten strokes of the New Library Bell, each stroke indicating one of the ten chief religions of the world as listed by Charles Carrol Bonney (President of the Exposition), viz. Theism, Judaism, Mahammedanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism, Catholicism, the Greek Church and Protestantism. It was indeed a unique phenomenon in the history of religions, for never before did the representatives of the world's religions gather in one place. It was a Parliament not only of Religions but also of humanity, for here on this broad international forum one could see seated, along with the representative religious dignitaries, many of the world's greatest philosophers and scientists. It was a magnificent spectacle to see a huge mass of humanity varying from seven to ten thousand in number march almost in a military formation to their seats and join the momentous sessions of the Parliament from day to day.

In the centre sat Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of the Roman Catholic Church in the Western Continent. On the right and left of him were gathered the Oriental delegates—Pratap Chandra Majumdar of Bengal and Nagarkar of Bombay, who were representatives of the Brahmo

Samaj; Dharmapala, who represented the Buddhists of Ceylon; Gandhi (a distant relative of Mahatma Gandhi) representing Jainism, and Mr. Chakravarty, who represented Theosophy with Mrs. Annie Besant. Conspicuous among these Oriental delegates was Swami Vivekananda who with his noble bearing, bright countenance and gorgeous apparel and a large yellow turban, soon attracted the attention of the assembled thousands that congregated on that historic occasion. In the midst of this vast concourse of enlightened men and women, Swami Vivekananda stood up with all the dignity, grace and charm of his spiritual personality, and, bowing down to Goddess Saraswati, surveyed in a sweep the whole assembly of the great hall and addressed the distinguished gathering as "Sisters and Brothers of America."

No sooner had these words been uttered, says Dr. Barrows, the Chairman of the Committee on the Selection of Delegates, than 'there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes', and the entire audience rose to their feet as a mark of appreciation of the great Swami who had cast off all formalism of the Congress and spoken to the audience in the language of their heart. The bewildered Swami could hardly realize the reason for this spontaneous outburst of joy at these simple words! When silence was restored, Swamiji at the very outset thanked the audience in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; in the name of the mother of religions and also in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects. He presented Hinduism as a religion which had taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance and quoted the two following illustrative passages from the scriptures: "As the different streams having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee".[11a] "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me."[11b]

It was a very brief speech, but its spirit of universality and broadmindedness coupled with the depth of his spiritual conviction captured the imagination of the delegates and threw them into an ecstasy of unprecedented delight. No doubt, Swami Vivekananda had occasions to give eleven lectures in some societies in the presence of some of the leading minds of America and to come into contact with a cross-section of American life before joining the Parliament; but this was in fact Swamiji's maiden speech in a distinguished gathering of such magnitude and international importance. Miss Monroe, the then Editor of '*Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*', while recording her impressions of the Parliament of Religions and of Swamiji in her autobiography entitled '*A Poet's*

[11a] *Mahimna-stotram*, 7.

[11b] *Gita*, ch. 4. 11.

Life', has candidly stated: "The Congress of Religions was a triumph for all concerned, especially for its generalissimo the Reverend John H. Barrows of Chicago's First Presbyterian Church, who had been preparing it for two years. When he brought down his gavel upon the 'world's first parliament of religions', a wave of breathless silence swept over the audience—it seemed a great moment in human history, prophetic of the promised new era of tolerance and peace. On the stage with him, at his left, was a black-coated array of bishops and ministers representing the various Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches; at his right a brilliant group of strangely costumed dignitaries from afar and a monk of the orange robe from Bombay. It was the last of these, Swami Vivekananda, the magnificent, who stole the whole show and captured the town. Others of the foreign groups spoke well... But the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic; his voice, rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervour of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western World he was facing for the first time—these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch." This resounding success of the Swami even in this opening session of the Parliament, made him one of the most popular figures in the whole assembly, and at the subsequent sessions. Wrote the *Northampton Daily Herald* on April 11, 1894, "Vivekananda was not allowed to speak until the close of the programme, the purpose being to make people stay until the end of the session . . . thousands would wait for hours to hear a fifteen minutes' talk from this remarkable man."

During the seventeen sessions of the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda, in the course of his illuminating addresses, placed before the learned audience the cardinal truths of Hinduism. He said: "From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of Science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion. . . Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal, and the science of religion becomes perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death; Him who is the constant basis of an everchanging world; One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no further. This is the goal of all Science. . . As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque or a cross. The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. . . . If a man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor, even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength till it reaches the Glorious Sun . . . To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal . . . The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: 'I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Whenever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.' . . . If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mahammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature. Offer such a religion and all nations will follow you."

"May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father-in-Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea!"

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. If the Parliament of religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world.

and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'"

The mighty words which were addressed by the Swami to the entire humanity over the heads of the official representatives in the Parliament made a tremendous appeal to the conscience of the people at large. The obscure Hindu monk of India, who was hooted and hated in the Chicago street only a day before, blossomed forth into a world-figure almost overnight and became the Prophet of a New Dispensation. Life-size pictures of the Swami were hung up on the streets of Chicago. The *New York Herald,* one of the most popular and widely circulated newspapers, editorially remarked, "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation." Though lauded up to the skies, from the platform and the press, the great Swami was not in the least puffed up with pride at this phenomenal success. For he was fully conscious that he was only an instrument in the hand of the Lord and his triumph was the triumph of Indian culture and the homage that the united nations paid to him on that memorable occasion was a spontaneous recognition of the greatness and universality of the Vedantic religion which he represented.

The news of his resounding triumph at the Parliament did not remain confined within the bounds of America, but soon reached the shores of India and was flashed in the various Indian journals and magazines from one part of the country to the other. His brother monks at the Baranagore monastery were elated with unspeakable joy to hear of the phenomenal achievement of their beloved leader in that far distant land as a literal fulfilment of Sri Ramakrishna's prophecy, "Naren shall shake the world to its foundations." The whole of India greeted with genuine pride and satisfaction the thrilling accounts of his brilliant success at the Parliament. Large and influential meetings were organized in the different parts of India, and addresses applauding his unique contribution to the cause of Hinduism in America were sent to him. Bengal did not lag behind in paying due homage to her illustrious son on this momentous occasion. The elite of the city of Calcutta organized a large representative public meeting in the Town Hall on September 5, 1894, under the presidentship of Raja Peary Mohan Mookherjee. Eminent speakers like Mr. N. N. Ghosh, Sri Surendranath Banerjee and others delivered eloquent speeches, highly eulogizing the important role played by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions towards the dissemination of the Hindu thought and culture among the Western nations. Resolutions expressing their felicitations on the brilliant success of the Swami were adopted and conveyed to him, and hearty thanks were also tendered in the meeing to Dr. J. H. Barrows, the Chairman, and Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell, the President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and also to the American people in general, for the cordial and sympathetic reception they had accorded to Swami Vivekananda. But in the midst of this universal acclamation, Swamiji could not enjoy even a modicum of mental peace. On the very day of his triumph, when he was invited by a man of affluence and distinction to his palatial building and entertained right royally and assigned for his sleep a princely room furnished with luxury, he, instead of feeling happy in this splendid environment, was extremely miserable. "As he retired the first night and lay upon his bed, the terrible contrast between poverty-stricken India and opulent America oppressed him. He could not sleep pondering over India's plight. The bed of down seemed to be a bed of thorns. The pillow was wet with his tears. He went to the window and gazed out into the darkness until he was well-nigh faint with sorrow. At length, overcome with emotion, he fell to the ground, crying out, 'O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comfort! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them'."[12] This deep love that welled up in his heart at the thought of the poor, the distressed and the despised people of India finds eloquent utterance in most of the letters he wrote from America to his disciples and admirers in India to stimulate them into a high pitch of patriotic activity. He once wrote, "I am called by the Lord for this. The hope lies in you—in the meek, the lowly, but the faithful. Feel for the miserable and look up for help—it will come. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land seeking for help. The Lord will help me. I may perish of cold and hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed. Go down on your faces before Him and make a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of a whole life for them—these hundred millions, going down and down every day. Glory unto the Lord, we will succeed. Hundreds will fall in the struggle—hundreds will be ready to take it up. Life is nothing, death is nothing. Glory unto the Lord—march on, the Lord is our General. Do not look back to see who falls—

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[12] Life of S. V., pp. 383-384.

forward, onward!" Here in this spontaneous outpouring of his heart we get a glimpse of what Vivekananda really was—a patriot and a saint in one, a spiritual genius in whom patriotism was deified into the highest saintship, and loving service to fellowmen, into true worship; for real patriotism was with him nothing short of the transfiguration of a man's own personality into the soul of his people, rising and sinking with them.

Before closing this chapter, we would do well to remember what Marie Louise Burke in her recently published book entitled *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* says regarding the cause of the universal ovation accorded to the Swami on this momentous occasion. She writes:[12a] "The descriptions we have of Swamiji at the Parliament of Religions show him as colourful and dynamic, dominating the scene with the force of his personality and the utter purity of his message. He was in the full vigor of his youth, ready to face the entire world and to sacrifice his life for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed of his motherland. And there was yet another reason for his phenomenal popularity. Never before had the people of America seen one in whom spiritual truths had been fully realized. Though the fact that Swamiji was such a one was not consciously known by the thousands who flocked to hear him speak, who waited interminable hours

[12a] Burke, Mary Lousie—*Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries*, p. 67.

for even a few words and who applauded when he simply crossed the platform, the people through some inner knowledge unerringly recognized him for what he was and, from start to finish, instinctively sensed that his very presence conferred a blessing. 'Darshan' was unheard of in America, but here at the Parliament was a spontaneous and unconscious manifestation of the attraction of the human soul to the spiritually great." She further adds:[12b] "It is undeniable that the American people had not been merely intellectually impressed by the nobility and supreme wisdom of Eastern doctrines which hitherto, in the words of Dr. Alfred Momaric, 'they had been taught to regard with contempt', but they had been touched by and had responded to the tremendous power of living spirituality that Swamiji embodied. Something far more important and more far-reaching had taken place than an intellectual appreciation of Eastern religions. It was as though the soul of America had long asked for spiritual sustenance and had now been answered."

Work in America

During the months Swamiji stayed in Chicago after the Parliament of Religions, he was the house-guest of various friends according as situations demanded. But the members of the family of Mr.

[12b] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

George W. Hale, Swamiji's first acquaintance in the city who had helped him to participate in the Parliament, were the most fortunate of all as Swamiji was not only their guest from time to time but he made their home his headquarters also during almost the whole of 1894 before the centre of his activities shifted eastward to the Atlantic coast. It was some time during this period that Madam Emma Calve, the celebrated songstress who had come to the city of Chicago with the Metropolitan Opera Company and was at the peak of her career, met Swamiji under a most tragic circumstance: Her only daughter on whom she lavished all her love was suddenly burned to death in the house of a friend while Calve was singing magnificently on the stage. The news was so shocking that she almost collapsed. Then came a period during which, being unable to bear this bereavement, she thrice attempted to commit suicide. But every time her attempt was foiled by an unseen hand of Providence. On the fourth day she, guided as it were by fate, inadvertently entered the house of a friend and sat in the living room in a pensive mood, when suddenly she heard a voice coming from the next room saying, "Come, my child. Don't be afraid." She got up on hearing these words of assurance and entered into the study where Swamiji was sitting behind a large table-desk. This providential meeting with the Swami was a blessing to her as his words instinct with spiritual force not only soothed her grief-stricken heart but also brought her once for all under the salutary spiritual influence of this great teacher of humanity.

Another incident of a quite different complexion occurred during this period at Chicago. John D. Rockfeller, who was subsequently regarded as one of the richest industrial magnates in America, was not at that time at the peak of his fortune. He had already heard much about the Hindu monk from his friends and was also invited several times by them to meet Swamiji; but for one reason or other he refused to comply with their request. "But one day although he did not want to meet Swamiji, he was pushed to it by an impulse and went directly to the house of his friends, brushing aside the butler who opened the door, and saying that he wanted to see the Hindu monk.

"The butler ushered him into the living room, and, not waiting to be announced, Rockfeller entered into Swamiji's adjoining study and was much surprised . . . to see Swamiji behind his writing table not even lifting his eyes to see who entered.

"After a while . . . Swamiji told Rockfeller much of his past that was not known to any but himself, made him understand that the money he had already accumulated was not his, that he was only a channel and that his duty was to do good to the world—that God had given him all his wealth in order that he might have an opportunity to help and do good to people.

"Rockfeller was annoyed that anyone dared to talk to him that way and tell him what to do. He left the room in irritation, not even saying good-bye. But about a week after, again without being announced, he entered Swamiji's study and finding him the same as before, threw on his desk a paper which told of his plans to donate an enormous sum of money toward the financing of a public institution.

"'Well, there you are', he said. 'You must be satisfied now, and you can thank me for it.'

"Swamiji didn't even lift his eyes, did not move. Then taking the paper, he quietly read it, saying, 'It is for you to thank me.' That was all. This was Rockfeller's first large donation to the public welfare."[13]

Soon after the termination of the historic sessions of the Parliament of Religions, it became the main object of Swami Vivekananda to acquaint the peoples of the West with the ideals of the civilization and the religious consciousness of his own race, to learn the secret of the material greatness of the Occident and also to collect adequate funds wherewith to provide his countrymen with scientific methods for the improvement of their economic condition. With this dual purpose in view he accepted the offer of a Lecture Bureau and visited almost all the important cities of America from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi river such as the East and the Middle West, Chicago, Iowa, Des

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[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

Moines, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Detroit, Boston, Cambridge, Baltimore, Washington, New York etc. and delivered illuminating lectures on a variety of subjects which comprised not only the history of the Indian people, the religion of the Vedanta and his future plan of work in India, but also the cardinal teachings of other leading faiths of the world and a comparative study of the cultures and civilizations of the East and the West. In the midst of this whirlwind lecture tour, he never forgot to bring into bold relief the spiritual side of his message, to widen the vision of all with whom he came into contact, and to emphasize as well the fact that though India might be seriously in need of material aid, the West stood infinitely more in need of spiritual assistance. Swamiji was at times extremely trenchant in his criticism of the Western way of life and culture and pointed out the dangers and drawbacks of the industrial civilization built on the quicksand of materialism, and also dealt smashing blows at the blind bigotry of the Christian zealots. The result was that, while the most sincere section of the Christian Society became his staunch admirers, the narrow-visioned fanatics who had neither the mind nor the intelligence to look beyond the tip of their nose, became his bitter enemies and began to calumniate him in season and out of season to lower him in the estimation of the American public. Even some of his own countrymen grew so jealous of his tremendous popularity that they also tried their best to prejudice the minds of some of the leading thinkers and savants of America against Swamiji. But the superb spiritual power, towering personality, intellectual brilliance and catholicity of outlook of the Swami bore down all opposition and nailed to the counter the sordid and mean campaign that was carried on by such wily propagandists. He soon became the centre of irresistible attraction and wheresoever he went to preach his message, he found his name blazoned in the newspapers. The *Detroit Free Press,* one of the leading journals of America, gives a glowing description of Swamiji, which is typical of what was published in other recognized papers in other cities of America. It writes: "Since the Parliament he has spoken to immense audiences in many towns and cities, who have but one opinion of praise and are enthusiastic over his magnetic power and his way of giving light and life to every subject he touches upon. Naturally his views of great questions, coming like himself from the other side of the globe, are refreshing and stirring to American people."

Swamiji soon came to realize that the main object of the Yankee lecturing organisations was to exploit his popularity to the utmost for the purpose of earning money for themselves, as he was not paid the legitimate amount he deserved for his lectures according to the terms and conditions specified in the agreement. Out of sheer disgust he lost no time in disentangling himself at Detroit from the yoke of such binding engagements of the Lecture Bureau in 1894, though at a considerable pecuniary loss, and began to move freely and independently from place to place in delivering the spiritual goods for the enlightenment of the brothers and sisters of this alien land. In November 1894, he went from Detroit to New York where, on the occasion of his previous short visit, he had already delivered a few lectures but could not initiate any work on a permanent basis. He now thought it prudent to settle down in this most enlightened city to begin some constructive work in right earnest and cultivate intimate acquaintance with those sincere souls who would lead a life of practical spirituality according to his instructions and guidance. With this end in view he accepted an invitation from Dr. Lewis G. Janes, the then President of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, to deliver a series of lectures on the Hindu Religion before the Society. His very first lecture on the ancient religion of India made such a profound impression upon the audience that there was a pressing demand, from all sides, for the continuation of his lectures in that very Association. Regarding the effect of the lecture, the *Brooklyn Standard* wrote, "It was the voice of the ancient Rishis of the Vedas, speaking sweet words of love and toleration through the Hindu monk, Paramahansa Swami Vivekananda, that held spell-bound every one of these many hundreds who had accepted the invitation of the Brooklyn Ethical Society and packed the large lecture hall and the adjoining rooms of the Pouch

Gallery on Clinton Avenue to overflowing, on the 31st December 1894. . . . Men of all professions and callings—doctors and lawyers and judges and teachers—together with many ladies, had come from all parts of the city to listen to his strangely beautiful and eloquent defence of the Religion of India. . . . He was a splended type of the famous sages of the Himalayas, a prophet of a new religion combining the morality of the Christians with the philosophy of the Buddhists."

Though Swamiji attained to phenomenal popularity in New York due to the series of learned lectures he delivered in the Brooklyn Society, he felt convinced that no substantial work could be built up in this country unless he were able to form an intimate circle of sincere souls who would devote themselves most seriously to the practice of the spiritual exercises which he inculcated in the course of enlightened discourses. To translate his conviction into action he settled down in a comparatively secluded part of the city and began to teach earnest-minded devotees, free of all charges. The door was kept wide open for men and women, rich and poor, high and low—without any distinction whatsoever, so that real seekers after truth belonging to the different strata of society could come into direct contact with him and profit by his spiritual talks. Very soon a brilliant group of sincere souls gathered round his magnetic personality and became inspired with the lofty spiritual ideals he placed before them. No doubt there was an insistent demand for public lectures from persons of wealth and social position, but the Swami did not respond to such invitations as he considered these class-talks more valuable and effective than mere platform speeches in moulding the lives of the genuine seekers after truth. From now on he whole-heartedly threw himself into this responsible task and began to teach them meditation and the processes of Yoga by a practical demonstration of the same along with his discourses. This had a salutary effect inasmuch as they also in their turn got necessary fillip and direction to develop a meditative habit and learn how to silence the creative ideations of the mind and to penetrate deep into the inmost recesses of the heart. Very often Swamiji himself passed into trance during these class-talks on *Yoga* and it took a long time to bring him back to normal consciousness. The whole atmosphere thus became so much surcharged with spirituality that any one who joined his classes was caught up in the current. In this way, Swamiji succeeded in creating in the new surroundings of a far-off land the stimulating atmosphere of serene peace and blessedness which prevailed in the sacred temple garden of Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges during the life-time of Sri Ramakrishna, the great Master.

In this centre of activity at New York Swamiji's life was a luminous example of austere habits and strict discipline as he played the role of an Indian Yogi to stimulate in the devotees an urge for leading a life of intense spiritual culture. This served to bring about a wonderful transformation in the lives of a good number of souls who came within the ambit of his spiritual influence. Miss S. E. Waldo of Brooklyn, who became one of Swamiji's foremost disciples and well-known under the name of Sister Haridasi, gives a vivid pen-picture of how the Swami carried on his spiritual ministration silently and patiently for the benefit of those who attended his class-talks. She writes: "A few of those who had heard him in Brooklyn now began to go to the place where he lived in New York. . . . The Swami himself sat on the floor and most of his audience likewise. . . . The door was left open and the overflow filled the hall and sat on the stair. . . . The Swami, so dignified yet so simple, so gravely earnest, so eloquent, and the close ranks of students, forgetting all inconveniences, hanging breathless on his every world! . . . It was a fit beginning for a movement that has since grown to such grand proportions. In this unpretentious way did Swami Vivekananda inaugurate the work of teaching Vedanta philosophy in New York. The Swami gave his services free as air . . . The classes began in February, 1895, and lasted until June; but long before that time they had outgrown their small beginnings and had removed downstairs to occupy an entire parlour floor and extension. The classes were held nearly every morning and on several evenings in every week. Some Sunday lectures were also given, and there were 'question' classes to help those to whom the teaching was so new and strange that they were desirous to have an opportunity for more extended explanation." In this manner the ideal of *Vedanta* in practice was planted in the soil of America and it began to take a deep root and draw real truth-seekers from the different parts of the country.

As already stated Swamiji taught the students *Raja-Yoga,* a systematic course of meditation which was supplemented by lessons on *Jnana-Yoga.* This provided the aspirant with the key to unlock the floodgate of spirituality and to attain to the realization of the supreme Reality—which, in Vedantic terminology, was Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*). He, moreover, laid special emphasis on certain prerequisites such as continence, abstemious habits, purity of life, simple *sattwika* food, physical austerities, dissociation from evil company and the like which helped forward the quick fructification of the Yogic exercises. But his training was regulated according to the particular tendency and mental make-up of every individual and as such it produced a rich harvest in the field of spiritual experiment in this foreign country. The secret of his success lay in the fact that he taught his disciples what he himself had experienced in his life of spiritual quest and that his teaching was always based more on a rational and scientific process than on the stereotyped theoretical exposition of the subject. This study circle became so popular within an incredibly short period of time that eminent physicians, physiologists and psychologists became very much interested in the *Raja-Yoga*. Swamiji's staunch devotee, Miss S. E. Waldo of Brooklyn, who acted as his amanuensis, used to note down his class-talks which were replete with the deepest philosophical insight and extraordinary outbursts of devotion, and revealed his nature as essentially a combination of the *Jnani* and *Bhakta,* the saint and true mystic in one. Swamiji collected these scattered notes kept by Miss Waldo, and edited and published them by June, 1895, in a book form called *Raja-Yoga*. The book was enthusiastically received by the American intelligentsia and the demand became so great that it ran into three editions within a few weeks of its publication. Even the eminent psychologist Prof. William James of the Harvard University got so much interested in the subject after the perusal of this treatise that he personally came to meet the great Swami at his residence at New York, became one of his ardent admirers and began to look upon him as a paragon of Vedantists. In his classical work, *The Variety of Religious Experience,* he specially refers to the Swami, while dealing with monistic mysticism. In this way many distinguished persons became his close associates, prominent amongst them being Mrs. Ole Bull, Dr. Allan Day, Miss S. E. Waldo, Professors Wyman and Wright, Dr. Street, and many clergymen and laymen of high distinction. Celebrated society people of New York such as Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett and Miss J. MacLeod also became most intimately associated with the Swami and helped him whole-heartedly in building up his work in America. Even the great electrician Nicolas Tesla had a profound admiration for the Swami for his most rational and impressive exposition of the *Sankhya* philosophy. Like Madame Calve, the famous French actress, Sarah Bernhardt—the "Divine Sarah" as she was called—was also attracted by the sublime teachings of the philosophy which he so faithfully and eloquently expounded. Thus the tireless endeavour of the Swami, coupled with the laudable support of his rich and influential followers, enabled him to consolidate his work in America and place it on a solid foundation by the month of June, 1895. He had now the mental satisfaction that the ideals of *Sanatan Dharma,* the Eternal Religion, were silently but surely seeping into the thought-world of America and bringing about a marvellous change in the outlook of the enlightened people of the country. But the Swami, in spite of his indomitable will and vigour, began to feel worried and jaded, and his physical frame, which had been brought almost to the breaking point due to this unceasing mental and intellectual strain, needed complete rest and recuperation for a more serious work in store for him in other parts of the Christian world. Very soon he got an invitation from Miss Dutcher, one of his students, to live in a small cottage at Thousand Island Park, the largest island in the St. Lawrence River, and accepted it gladly as this would afford him an opportunity not only to give some rest to his tired limbs but also to provide a suitable and congenial forum for those who would devote themselves whole-heartedly to the study of the *Vedanta* and mould their lives in the light of its lofty teachings. The cottage was ideally situated, being perched on a tableland overlooking a wide sweep of the beautiful river with many of its far-famed Thousand Islands, and gradually sloping down towards the shores of the river. The stillness of this sequestered place, screened from public view by thick woods, the idyllic beauty of the sylvan area, the melodious warblings of sweet-toned birds, the gentle murmur of the green leaves of trees and the soft silvery rays of the moon occasionally illumining this scene of enchantment, converted the locality into an earthly paradise. In this much-coveted solitude the great Teacher spent seven weeks with his devoted students who were deeply inspired by listening to the pregnant lessons of their spiritual preceptor. Miss S. E. Waldo, who also accompanied the Swami, while giving a vivid pen-picture of the Teacher and his stay in the Thousand Island Park, writes:[14]

"It was a perpetual inspiration to live with a man like Swami Vivekananda. From morning till night it was ever the same, we lived in constant atmosphere of intense spirituality. Often playful and fun-loving, full of merry jest and quick repartee, he was never for a moment far from the dominating note of his life. Everything could furnish a text or an illustration, and in a moment we would find ourselves swept from amusing tales of Hindu mythology to the deepest philosophy. The Swami had an inexhaustible fund of mythological lore and surely no race is more abundantly supplied with myths than those ancient Aryans. He loved to tell them to us and we were delighted to listen, for he never failed to point out the reality hidden under myth and story and to draw from it valuable spiritual lessons. Never had fortunate students greater cause to congratulate themselves on having so gifted a Teacher!

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[14] *Life*, 6th Edn., p. 358.

"By a singular coincidence just twelve students followed the Swami to Thousand Island Park, and he told us that he accepted us as real disciples and that was why he so constantly and freely taught us, giving us his best. All the twelve were not all together at once, ten being the largest number present at any time. Two of our members subsequently became Sannyasins. . . . On the occasion of the consecration of the second Sannyasin, the Swami initiated two of us as Brahmacharins."

The silent but eventful weeks from the 19th June to the 6th August spent in that beautiful Island in the company of a devoted batch of Christian students form one of the most thrilling episodes in the history of Swamiji's work in America. The disciples of their own accord divided amongst themselves all the household works which they performed with unabating zeal and in a spirit of self-dedication and worshipful service. From day to day they were treated to the dainty delicacies of spiritual talks and discourses and were taken through a prescribed programme of meditation, study and prayer for their spiritual unfoldment. They also listened with rapt attention to the outpourings of his own spirit which was in constant communion with the Highest. The subjects dealt with during his stay in this peaceful retreat were gleaned from the sacred books of the East such as the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Upanishads* and *Brahma-Sutras* of Vyasa, and he presented with as much lucidity as possible the various systems of Indian philosophy including the Dualism (*Dwaita*) of Sri Madhva, qualified non-dualism (*Visistadwaita*) of Sri Ramanuja, and the absolute monism (*Advaita*) of Sri Sankara. Besides, he presented to them for the first time a vivid picture of his own *Guru* Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, one of the greatest incarnations of the world, his spiritual austerities and practice of all the leading faiths of mankind, harmonization of the apparently contradictory systems of thought and also his universality of outlook on life. He narrated at the same time his own incessant struggle for the realization of the Highest Truth in the sacred temple-garden of Dakshineswar at the feet of this great Master. An atmosphere similar to what prevailed in Dakshineswar was created here also by Swamiji in this lonely retreat by releasing from day to day a cascade of divine ecstasy which swept the souls of the devotees that gathered round his charming personality. The Swami threw light upon all manner of subjects, historical and philosophical, spiritual and temporal, and it seemed as if the contents of nature were pouring themselves forth as a grand revelation of the many-sidedness of the Eternal Truth. We find today glimpses of some of these inspired utterances of the great Swami in the form of a book known as *The Inspired Talks*. It was due to the sedulous care and industry of Miss Waldo that these highly enlightened talks had been preserved for the benefit and guidance of all spiritual aspirants.

The object of Swamiji 'to manufacture a few Yogis out of the materials of the classes' during this brief period of residence in this island retreat was fulfilled in a large measure. His profound teachings and dynamic spiritual personality left an indelible impress upon the minds of this fortunate group of devotees. Most of them gathered from the gospel of this great Teacher abundant spiritual viaticum for their arduous journey in life and devoted themselves to the practice of meditation under his inspiring guidance. One day the great Swami himself passed into the *nirvikalpa samadhi* here on the banks of the St. Lawrence as he did in the holy garden of Cossipore by the side of the Ganges. It was here in this inspiring atmosphere that he penned his famous poem *The Song of the Sannyasin*—a poetical masterpiece which is vibrant with a resounding note of renunciation and deep spiritual fervour and also gives a glimpse of the depth of his *Advaita* realization.

Scarcely had he thus finished the responsible task of training a band of devoted selfless workers, when he received an invitation from Miss Henrietta Muller to be her guest in London. Mr. E. T. Sturdy, who had previously practised severe austerities in the Himalayas and had long been intimately acquainted with Indian thought and culture, extended to the Swami a similar cordial invitation to live with him in London. This offered the Swami a golden opportunity to carry the message of the *Vedanta* also to the enlightened society of England. Considering this to be a call from the Most High, he soon returned from the Island to New York and after entrusting his nascent work in America to a group of trained adherents, sailed for England in the middle of August, 1895. But as the newly planted sapling of *Vedanta* work in the soil of America needed tender care and nourishment at his own hands for its steady growth and development, Swamiji had to come back to New York after a brief stay in England and he resumed his preaching work in America with the renewed vigour and zeal of a martyr.

During the absence of Swami Vivekananda in England, the work in America, which had been built up after a good deal of struggle and sacrifice, was managed with conspicuous success by some of his most devoted western disciples, such as Swamis Kripananda and Abhayananda and Miss S. E. Waldo, who not only conducted the weekly *Vedanta* classes regularly but carried the message of their Master to the various cities of the Union. Their work was highly appreciated by the educated public and as a result two new centres grew up,—one at Buffalo and the other at Detroit where the work of spreading the message of *Vedanta* was enthusiastically carried on by the earnest seekers of truth. Swamiji, on his return from England on December 6, 1895, decided to close his public lectures and to organise the *Vedanta* movement into a definite society. But before he could translate this idea into action, he had to respond to the insistent demand for public lectures in some of the important centres of learning. At Madison Square Garden he delivered, on February 24, a very inspiring lecture on *My Master* which is an eloquent and glorious tribute to his great spiritual preceptor. Only a few days before this memorable public lecture, a group of young men and women took *mantras* from him, and Dr. Street, a devout disciple of Swamiji, was initiated into *sannyasa* by him and given the name of Swami Yogananda. The very fact that even in this foreign land and in the thick of alien culture the ideal of renunciation, chastity and poverty was embraced by persons of learning, position and culture, indubitably proved that human nature was the same everywhere and it needed only favourable circumstances and spiritual fillip for its unfoldment and healthy evolution. On March 25, he was invited to speak before the graduate students of the Philosophy Department of the Harvard University on the *Philosophy of the Vedanta.* His lecture created such a profound impression upon the minds of the professors that he was offered even a Chair of Eastern Philosophy in the University. He was also invited to accept the Chair of Sanskrit in the Columbia University. But as a *sannyasin* be could not accept them and so he declined the offers with thanks. As contemplated before, he now closed his public lectures in New York and began to issue his teachings in book forms. Thus "The Vedanta Society of New York"—a non-sectarian body with the distinct purpose of preaching and practising the *Vedanta* and applying its principles to all religions—came into existence with toleration and acceptance of all religions as its watchwords. People belonging to the various religious creeds and organizations were cordially invited to enlist themselves as members of the Society without change of faith. This catholicity of spirit and universality of outlook had a tremendous appeal to the real truth-seekers who enthusiastically rallied under the banner of this universal ideal of the *Vedanta* at the New York Centre. His religious treatises such as the *Raja-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga* and *Karma-Yoga,* which had already seen the light of the day, aroused a considerable interest amongst the great savants and thinkers of America and helped forward the dissemination of his spiritual ideas and ideals in this foreign land.

One of the principal objects of Swamiji in organizing a Vedanta Society in New York was to open a suitable centre for an exchange of ideas between the East and the West for the well-being of both. It was his settled conviction that the science of the West and the philosophy of the East must shake hands with each other; for, in the ultimate analysis the two meet at a point where humanity stands as one indivisible entity. He averred that Science coupled with *Vedanta* was the ideal of future humanity. Swamiji was however conscious that to make the lofty spiritual ideas of the Hindu religious lore easily acceptable to the Western world, they should be interpreted in a most rationalistic and scientific way. He therefore felt the need of a thorough reorganisation of the religio-philosophical thought of India if it was to regain its conquering force and penetrate deep into the core of the Western life and fertilize the soil of Occidental culture. Already he had in his mind a plan of bringing from India some of his monastic brother disciples to impart religious teaching to the American people and of sending in return some of his trained and devout American and English disciples to India to give the Indians practical training in Science and applied Sociology, Economics and Industry, and in the ideas of organisation and co-operation. The Swami would very often tell his American followers with the bold conviction of a seer that time was not far distant when the lines of demarcation both in thought and ideal between the East and the West would be completely obliterated and the two ends would meet in a spirit of harmonious co-operation to evolve a newer type of civilization and culture for the good of humanity at large. Swamiji now intended to undertake a second trip to England to consolidate and intensify his newly started work among the Englishmen. Keeping in view that his American work might not suffer a set-back during his absence, he made Mr. Francis H. Leggett, one of the rich and influential residents of the city, the President of the Vedanta Society, and his initiated disciples were put in charge of other offices of the centre. After having completed this arrangement for the smooth working of the Society and the efficient management of its incipient acivities, the Swami sailed on April 15, for England where he carried on his Vedantic activity till the end of July, 1896. Thus "surveying the history of his work, one sees the Swami Vivekananda moving through the West as some mighty, glorious and effulgent light. A Plato in thought, a modern Savonarola in his fearless outspokenness, and adored as a Master and as a Prophet, the Swami moved amongst his disciples as some great Bodhisattva amongst his devotees. Some looked upon him even as a Buddha, others as a Christ, some as a Rishi of the Upanishads, whilst others as a Sankaracharya; and all regarded him as the embodiment of the Highest Consciousness . . . The Swami Vivekananda lives in the memory of America as the Man with a Message for the West, 'one who walked with God'."[15]

Work in England

As already stated, what with an urgent need to recoup his health seriously undermined by his ceaseless activity in America, and what with an inner urge to carry to the British intelligentsia the same message of *Vedanta* which had awakened the foremost thinkers and cultured men and women of America to a new order of thought and a new spiritual outlook, Swamiji journeyed through the continent of Europe to England where he stayed three times during the whole course of his first tour in the West i.e. from September to the end of November, 1895, from April to the end of July, 1896, and again from October to Decembei 16, 1896, after his short continental tour. The sea voyage served as a restorative to his failing health and exhausted brain and his short stay in Paris, the hub of European culture, offered him a very good opportunity to know much of the highly artistic instincts of the

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[15] *Life*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. I., p. 502.

French people. He furthermore became acquainted with some enlightened personages and held illuminating discourses with them on subjects ranging from the highest spiritual to the most learned studies. Thus he utilized this occasion in carefully studying and observing with his eagle-eye the cultural life of the West.

Immediately on his arrival in London, he was cordially received by Mr. E. T. Sturdy and Miss Henrietta Muller. Very soon his friends and admirers arranged evening classes and talks in private houses. But these classes became so popular and attractive that they could not be kept limited to a small group of people. Numerous distinguished visitors including Lady Isabel Margesson and several of the nobility began to seek interviews and crowded into his class rooms to listen to his inspiring discourses. The representatives of the leading journals like *The Westminster Gazette* and *The Standard* publicised his learned talks in the editorial columns and thus made Swamiji the focus of attention of the persons of light and leading in London. The preliminary spade-work having thus been accomplished with unexpected success, Swamiji, in response to the requests of his friends, delivered a public lecture on the evening of October 22, at Princes' Hall, Piccadilly, one of the most fashionable places in the metropolis of London. In appreciation of the lecture which was a tremendous success, *The Standard* wrote: "Since the days of Ram Mohan Roy, with the single exception of Keshub Chandra Sen, there has not appeared on an English platform a more interesting Indian figure than the Hindu who lectured in Princes' Hall . . . In the course of his lecture, he made remorselessly disparaging criticism on the work that factories, engines, and other inventions and books were doing for man, compared with half-a-dozen words spoken by Buddha or Jesus. The lecture was evidently quite extemporaneous and was delivered in a pleasing voice free from any kind of hesitation."

Swamiji's expectation was more than fulfilled. His misgiving that the preaching work of a Hindu monk hailing from a subject race in the land of the ruling power would not receive as cordial a reception as it had done in America was dispelled in no time. The Press welcomed his religious and philosophical ideas which were based mainly on the universal principles of the *Vedanta* and the *Gita;* some of the most enlightened clubs of the city and even leaders of its prominent educational institutions invited him and received him with marked admiration. In short, he occupied very soon a position of honour in the best circles of English society and the members of the nobility were glad to reckon him as their friend. A correspondent of a daily journal who attended the class lectures of the Swami writes: "It is indeed a rare sight to see some of the most fashionable ladies in London seated on the floor cross-legged, of course for want of chairs, listening with all the *bhakti* of an Indian *chela* towards his *Guru.* The love and sympathy for India that the Swamiji is creating in the minds of the English-speaking race is sure to be a tower of strength for the progress of India." The spontaneous response his message thus received in England brought about a complete change in his idea of the British public. He himself proclaimed with superb frankness after his return to India: "No one ever landed on English soil with more hatred in his heart for a race than I did for the English... There is none among you... who loves the English people more than I do now..." He soon realized that a cultural conquest of the British would create an excellent opening for the spread of India's spiritual and cultural heritage all over the world. So he subsequently wrote in a letter to Mr. Francis Leggett in America on July 6, 1896: "The British Empire with all its drawbacks is the greatest machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas. I mean to put my ideas in the centre of this machine and they will spread all over the world."

It was during his first visit to England that Miss Margaret Noble (afterwards known as Sister Nivedita) came into personal touch with this great Hindu monk. She was the Headmistress of a school and an important member of the Sesame Club founded for the furtherance of educational purposes. She moved in quiet but highly intellectual circles and was deeply interested in all modern influences and thought. It is worth while to reproduce here a few lines from her monumental work *The Master as I saw Him* about her first meeting with the Swami. She says: " . . . the time was a cold Sunday afternoon in November, and the place, it is true, a West-end drawing room. But he was seated facing a half-circle of listeners, with the fire on the hearth behind him . . . Never again in England did I see the Swami as a teacher in such simple fashion. Later, he was always lecturing, or the questions he answered were put with formality by members of larger audiences. Only this first time we were but fifteen or sixteen guests, intimate friends, many of us, and he sat amongst us, in his crimson robe and girdle, as one bringing us news from a far land, with a curious habit of saying now and again 'Siva! Siva!' and wearing that look of mingled gentleness and loftiness, that one sees on the faces of those who live much in meditation, that look, perhaps, that Raphael has painted for us, on the brow of the Sistine Child."[16] This first meeting with Swamiji, her future spiritual *Guru,* left on her mind an indelible impression of the profound sanctity and purity of the life and message of this great Mastermind, and Miss Noble did not from now miss an opportunity to attend Swamiji's thrilling and interesting lectures and talks. As a matter of fact, the novelty and breadth of his religious culture and the intellectual freshness of his philosophical outlook coupled with his stirring call in the name of all that is holy and healthy made an irresistible appeal to the inquisitive mind and the fervid imagination of this highly gifted girl. The more intimately did she mix with the Swami, the greater light did she get in the solution of the manifold problems which were crowding in her mind from day to day. Thus in the course of three months which Swamiji spent on this occasion of his first visit to England, he succeeded in conquering the hearts of many enlightened persons of high eminence, distinguished educationists and even learned clericals and church dignitaries. Mr. E. T. Sturdy, writing to the *Brahmavadin* in the month of February, 1896, about the Swami's visit to England, says: "The visit of the Swami Vivekananda to England has demonstrated that there exists a thoughtful, educated body of people here, which has only to be found and properly approached, to benefit very largely from the life-giving stream of Indian thought."

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[16] Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him,* 8th Edn., pp. 3-4.

Swamiji had to return to America in response to an urgent call from the members of the Vedanta Society at New York where his presence became an indispensable necessity to meet the pressing spiritual needs of the people. So, advising the most intimate group of persons to form themselves into a body and to regularly meet together and read the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu scriptures, Swamiji left for New York to allow the seeds sown in the soil of London time to germinate.

After consolidating his work in New York, Swamiji came back to London for the second time on April 15, 1896, and was extremely delighted to see his brother monk Swami Saradananda there as the guest of Mr. E. T. Sturdy. He had reached London from Calcutta on April 1, 1896, according to the express desire of Swamiji to take up the thread of work already started by him in England. Swamiji heard from him with absorbing interest all particulars about the monastery in Alambazar and also listened to a detailed account of what his brother monks were doing in India. On the other hand, he communicated to Saradananda all that had hitherto been done through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, in America and England, and also disclosed with apostolic fervour his future plans of work in India and abroad. Both of them now resided in St. George's Road as the guests of Miss Muller and Mr. Sturdy, and very shortly persons of distinction, students of comparative religion and many earnest seekers after truth began to frequent their quarters to learn the various forms of *Yoga*, and to study the problem of human life in their light.

Swamiji soon began his regular classes on *Jnana Yoga* (the Path of Wisdom). His Sunday lectures comprised such subjects as 'The Necessity of Religion', 'A Universal Religion', 'The Real and the Apparent Man', 'Renunciation', 'Realization', and the like which strongly appealed to the intellectually gifted people of England and prepared the ground for a steady march of Hindu thought and culture throughout the length and breadth of the country. Swami Vivekananda's brilliant exposition of Hindu ideas and ideals, lucid treatment of Christian theology and teachings of Lord Jesus, as also his critical analysis of the drawbacks of Western culture and industrial civilization, drew unstinted admiration from the cream of the cultured society of England. His learned lecture on Education at the Sesame Club was a masterpiece of eloquence and was an eye-opener to many intellectuals who posed themselves as leaders in the field of education. They discovered a deeper significance in Swamiji's definition of education as the manifestation of the perfection already in man, and began from now to tackle the problem of child education from a new angle of vision. Miss Margaret E. Noble, who was the convener of the meeting, was so much impressed by Swamiji's illuminating dissertation on Education at the Club that she felt a greater urge to gather more light from the Swami not only on matters educational but also on the various complex problems of her own life.

During his stay in London, he met the celebrated Indologist, Professor Max Muller of the Oxford University, by special invitation, at his residence on May 28, 1896. Swamiji was deeply impressed to see the profundity of the scholarship of the great orientalist. Swamiji himself wrote to the *Brahmavadin* on June 6, as follows: "What an extraordinary man is Professor Max Muller! I paid a visit to him a few days ago. I should say, that I went to pay my respects to him, for whosoever loves Sri Ramakrishna, whatever be his or her sect, or creed, or nationality, my visit to that person I hold as a pilgrimage. . . The visit was really a revelation to me. That nice little house, its setting of a beautiful garden, the silver-headed sage, with a face calm and benign, and forehead smooth as a child's in spite of seventy winters, and every line in that face speaking of a deep-seated mine of spirituality somewhere behind; . . . the trees, the flowers, the calmness, and the clear sky—all these sent me back in imagination to the glorious days of ancient India, the days of our *Brahmarshis* and *Rajarshis*. It was neither the philologist nor the scholar that I saw, but a soul that is every day realizing its oneness with the Brahman, a heart that is every moment expanding to reach the oneness with the Universal. . . And what love he bears towards India! I wish I had a hundredth part of that love for my own motherland. Endued with an extraordinary, and, at the same time, an intensely active mind, he has lived and moved in the world of Indian thought for fifty years or more, and watched the sharp interchange of light and shade in the interminable forest of Sanskrit literatures with deep interest and heart-felt love, till they have all sunk into his very soul and coloured his whole being. Max Muller is a Vedantist of Vedantists. . . ."

The Professor, who had already gathered some facts about the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna from India and written a pamphlet entitled *A Real Mahatman,* was now extremely anxious after his talk with Swamiji to know more about the Master so as to bring out a larger and fuller account of his life and gospels. Swamiji at once commissioned Swami Saradananda to collect from India greater details regarding the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. The materials, thus gathered, were placed at the disposal of the learned Professor who set to work at once and embodied them in a book which was published under the title *The Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna.* Needless to point out that this treatise, coming as it did from the powerful pen of a scholar of the eminence of Max Muller, created a great sensation in England and materially helped the Swami in carrying on his mission in the English-speaking world with greater ease and success.

Swami Vivekananda's second visit to England was memorable for another reason. He was able to gather to his fold some most diligent and devout workers who proved martyrs to his noble cause. As already stated, the Swami had intimate acquaintance during his first visit with Miss Henrietta Muller, Miss Margaret E. Noble, Mr. E. T. Sturdy and others. They now became his disciples, ready to sacrifice everything for their spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda in his effort to spread the mission of the *Vedanta.* Very soon a devoted couple, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, who were earnest students of religion and sought for the Hightst Truth in various sects and creeds in vain, came to meet the "Indian Yogi" to satisfy their spiritual hunger. Their joy knew no bounds when after their talk with the Swami they found in him the man and the philosophy they had been seeking all through their lives. At the very first meeting, Swamiji addressed Mrs. Sevier as "Mother", and from that day the couple looked upon the Swami not only as their *Guru* but also as their son. Thus from the land of the ruling people were presented to the great Swami four most valuable gifts in the person Sister Nivedita, J. J. Goodwin and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier who consecrated their lives to the service of India.

Trip to the Continent

The nerve-racking exertions which the Swami made in his supreme effort to place his work on a sound basis in England made it absolutely necessary for him to get away for the time being from the crowded life of activity into the salubrious atmosphere of some hilly region. Accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Sevier and Miss Henrietta Muller, Swamiji started towards the end of July, 1896, for a short trip to the Continent. The party soon reached Switzerland which became the greatest attraction for Swamiji as its snow-covered high hills, the beautiful villages on the mountain-sides, the industrious peasantry, the bracing climate and the silent atmosphere reminded him all at once of the sky-kissing Himalayas—the beauty spot of India. The Swami was at his best when he came to a village nestling in the Alps. It was here that he enjoyed some of the most luminous spiritual moments of his life in the midst of the uplifting silence of the scene that was not disturbed in the least by the din and bustle of the madding crowd's ignoble strife. Swamiji felt completely refreshed by his two weeks' stay in this delightful lap of the Alps. It was here in the solitude of the hills that Swamiji first expressed his desire to build up in the bosom of his beloved Himalayas a monastery where his Indian and Western disciples would live together and carry on spiritual practices and from where trained Indian workers would go out as preachers of *Vedanta* to the West, and the Western disciples would devote their lives to the good of India. The idea, though casually vented by the Swami, sank so deep into the hearts of the Sevier couple that they did not rest content till the scheme did actually materialize. Swamiji unexpectedly received an urgent letter from the illustrious Orientalist, Paul Deussen, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kiel in Germany, inviting him most cordially to his place. Prof. Deussen, who had very recently returned from his Indian tour, soon became acquainted with the lectures and utterances of the Swami, and having found in him an original thinker and a spiritual genius, felt a strong desire to meet him to discuss intricate philosophical problems with him.

On his way to Kiel, he visited Heidelberg Coblenz, the centre of one of the greatest Universities, Cologne and the great city of Berlin, and was highly impressed to see the material greatness and the learning of the people of Germany. On his arrival at the Professor's residence in Kiel, the Swami was cordially received by the learned Professor. Mrs. Sevier gives an interesting account of this eventful meeting as follows: "... After a few preliminary enquiries regarding the travels and plans of Swamiji, I noticed the Professor directing his eyes to some volumes lying open on the table, and with a scholar's appreciation of learning, he soon turned the conversation on books ... He considered the system of the Vedanta as founded on the Upanishads and Vedanta Sutras, with Sankaracharya's commentaries, some of the most majestic structures and valuable products of the genius of man in his search for truth, and that the highest and purest morality is the immediate consequence of the Vedanta..." "It seems," the Professor added, "that a movement is being made back towards the fountain-head of spirituality, a movement that will, in the future, probably make India, the spiritual leader of the nations, the highest and greatest spiritual influence on earth..." Due to urgent calls from London Swamiji could not prolong his stay at Kiel in spite of the repeated requests of Prof. Deussen. It was therefore arranged that the latter would meet him at Hamburg and proceed with the Swami to London. After reaching this destination, Prof. Deussen was accommodated in the house of one of his friends in St. John's Wood, while the Swami lived with Mr. and Mrs. Sevier in their house in Hampstead. For two whole weeks during his stay in London, Prof. Deussen frequently visited Swamiji and held discussions on the most recondite principles of the *Vedanta* which enabled him to have a much clearer conception of the whole system of *Vedanta* philosophy. He was convinced taht a person who wants to go deeper into the very core of Indian philosophy must divest himself of all preconceived notions and then come to grips with the lofty philosophical system of the Hindus.

It is to be noted that the Swami, after giving necessary instruction to Swami Saradananda in the matter of preaching work, had already sent him at the end of June, 1896, to New York in the company of Mr. J. J. Goodwin. Within a few days of his arrival there Swami Saradananda made a very favourable impression upon the disciples and students of *Vedanta* in America by his eloquent lectures on Indian philosophy and interesting classes on the *Yoga* Systems. This news of the success of his brother disciple in America delighted Swami Vivekananda beyond measure as he was satisfied that the work he had initiated in America was now safe in the hands of Saradananda who was quite competent to carry on the *Vedanta* work with confidence and success there.

As days rolled on, the general public in England became more and more enthusiastic to listen to the learned lectures of Swamiji which now mostly covered the philosophical portions of the *Vedanta* known as *Jnana-Yoga*. "Extraordinarily equipped as he was to garb the greatest metaphysical truths in a poetic language of wonderful depth and profundity, he made the dizzy heights of *Advaita* appear like a land rich with the verdure of noblest human aspiration and fragrant with the flowers of finest emotions. The tremendous power of his personality behind his utterances, made every word fall like a thunderbolt upon his audience."[17] The effect of lectures covering a wide range of subjects was so deep and penetrating that, besides those already referred to, many other celebrities including Mr. Frederick H. Myers, the well-known author of several psychological works, Hopps, the non-conformist minister, Mr. Moncure D. Conway, the positivist and peace advocate, Mr. Edward Carpenter, the author of *Towards Democracy*, Canon Wilberforce, the great orator, also became very much interested in Indian thought and culture. His mental strain was, however, greatly relieved when he soon found by his side his brother monk, Swami Abhedananda, who had just arrived from India at the urgent call of the Swami to assist him in his London work. Swamiji began to train him as assiduously as he had trained Swami Saradananda, so that he might carry the burden on his shoulders with good cheer and confidence even in his absence. And his joy knew no bounds when he saw Swami Abhedananda acquit himself most creditably in his maiden speech on the *Vedanta* at a club in Bloomsbury Square, on October 27, 1896. "It was the joy," to quote Mr. Eric Hammond, "of a spiritual father over the achievement of a well-beloved son, a successful and brilliant student." Swamiji instinctively felt sure, "even if I perish on this plane my message will be sounded through these dear lips and the world will hear it. . . ."

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[17] *Life*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. II., p. 325.

Reports began to pour in from New York that Swami Saradananda with his organising ability and wonderful capacity for conducting classes had proved a grand success in America and that the sphere of Vedantic influence was steadily expanding from day to day under the aegis of the Vedanta Society established at New York. Swamiji being now confident that the Vedantic movement set on foot both in America and England would not suffer any set-back in his absence, began seriously to think of returning to the sacred soil of his motherland at the earliest opportunity to begin his contemplated work in India with the help and co-operation of his foreign disciples. Towards the middle of November (1896) Swamiji, after a class lecture, all on a sudden asked Mrs. Sevier to purchase four tickets immediately to avail themselves of the most convenient steamer from Naples. As Mr. and Mrs. Sevier were mentally prepared and anxious to go to India to lead the *Vanaprastha* life and help the Swami as far as practicable in his work in India, they accelerated their preparations and eventually secured berths on the steamer *Printz Regent Luitpold* which was to leave Naples for Ceylon on December 16. Mr. and Mrs. Sevier disposed of all their belongings and placed at the disposal of their Master the whole of the sale-proceeds. Thus freed from all tentacles of domestic ties, they kept themselves ready for the voyage to India. Besides the Sevier couple, Swamiji's devoted disciple and personal attendant and Secretary, Mr. Goodwin, was also to accompany him. Moreover, Swamiji contemplated to take to India later on other English and American lady disciples who would dedicate themselves to the furtherance of the cause of education for Indian womanhood. On the eve of his departure from England, the friends and followers of Swamiji organised a farewell meeting on December 13 at the Royal Society of Painters in Water colours in Piccadilly. Mr. E. T Sturdy, the Chairman of the meeting, presented an address of farewell to the Swami. Touching references were made by men and women in the course of their parting speeches to the esteem and affection Swamiji had won from all. Many hearts became sad and many eyes became laden with tears to think of their imminent separation from their beloved friend, philosopher and guide.

Swamiji reciprocated their sentiments and replied in terms of great affection and glowing spiritual fervour. He assured them that wherever he might be, he would never cease to work for them and help them until all came to realize the Highest Truth. Leaving Swami Abhedananda in charge of the *Vedanta* work in England, the Swami bade adieu to London on December 16, and started for the Continent in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, while Mr. Goodwin sailed from Southampton to meet the party at Naples. Just before his departure for India, an English friend incidentally put the poser to the Swami: "Swami, how do you like your motherland now after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?" The great patriot-saint of India replied with his characteristic frankness and the emphasis he could command: "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy, it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage , the *tirtha!*" A worthy utterance from the lips of a worthy son of mother India indeed!

Back to the Motherland

The party, after crossing the English Channel, travelled by train through France to Milan in Italy. Swamiji was immensely delighted to see some of the remnants of the ancient glories of the Holy Roman Empire still in existence in such great cities as Milan, Pisa and Florence. Thereafter he proceeded to Rome, the famous imperial city, where he spent about a week in visiting almost all the places of historical importance, including the palaces of the Caesars, the Forum, the Palatine Hill, the Temple Vesta, the Colosseum, the Capitoline Hill, the Vatican etc. These monumental achievements of the once mighty Roman rulers brought before his imagination the whole history of the Roman empire from the heyday of its power to the days of its decline. The itinerary did not permit him to prolong his stay in this magnificent capital city. On his way to Naples, Swamiji however had an opportunity to see the famous crater Vesuvius and the city of Pompeii, and also the Museum and the Aquarium which greatly attracted the attention of the party.

As scheduled, the steamer arrived at Naples from Southampton, bringing Mr. Goodwin as one of its passengers, and Swamiji, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, embarked the ship which left the shores of Italy for Colombo on December 30, 1896. The home-coming of Swamiji was an event of great historical importance, heralding the dawn of an unprecedented spiritual resurgence in India. The news of his prospective return had already spread like wildfire throughout the length and breadth of India. The whole country was maddened with enthusiasm to accord a right royal reception to the heroic son of India who was returning adorned with an aureole of unique glory, for his resounding victory at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and also for his signal success in the whirlwind activities carried on with so much assiduity and self-dedication for the dissemination of the lofty ideals of *Vedanta* for about four years throughout the whole civilized world of the West. The entire sub-continent of India rose to a man as it were to receive back with honour and gratitude her worthy son, who only a few years back was an obscure *Sannyasin* travelling penniless and bare-footed from the foot of the snow-capped Himalayas to Cape Comorin with only a begging bowl in hand. Nobody did ever dream that such an unknown son of the soil would all on a sudden burgeon forth into a world figure and occupy the most dignified position of a spiritual teacher in an incredibly short period of time both in India and abroad. But Swamiji, whose name had already become a household word in India and thrilled his countrymen into white heat of admiration, was quite ignorant of the tremendous preparations that were going on to welcome him in the land of his birth.

The ship *Printz Regent Luitpold*, with the victorious Swami and his beloved disciples on board, soon steamed near the coast of Ceylon in the early hours of January 15, 1897, and the Swami was filled with an ineffable joy to see after such a long period of separation the beautiful face of his beloved motherland shining in the roseate hues of the rising sun. Immediately on his arrival at the Colombo Port, he was greeted with deafening jubilant cheers from the seething mass of humanity that had gathered at the quays. A big multitude rushed towards him to touch his holy feet. He was profusely garlanded and taken in a huge procession like a great victor to the accompaniment of an Indian band playing select airs through the thoroughfare bedecked with triumphal arches and festoons and strewn with flowers. The Swami and his disciples, accompanied by Swami Niranjanananda who had come all the way from Bengal to receive his beloved brother, took their seats amidst a shower of flowers in the pandal erected for his reception. The Hon. Mr. P. C. Coomaraswamy, on behalf of the Hindu citizens of Colombo, bowed to the Swami in oriental fashion and read an address of welcome which was responded to by the Swami in a most eloquent and impressive speech. During the period of his stay for ten days in Ceylon he visited also Kandy, Anuradhapuram and Jaffna, and everywhere he received tremendous ovation as a mark of appreciation of his invaluable services to the cause of Hindu thought and culture in the West.

It was on Tuesday, January 26, that the steamer reached Pamban where the Raja of Ramnad, a devoted disciple of Swamiji, rushed to meet him in person. The citizens of Pamban accorded him a most cordial welcome under a decorated pandal. In reply to this address of welcome which was remarkable for its depth of feeling, Swami Vivekananda pointed out that the backbone of the Indian national life was neither politics nor military power, neither commercial supremacy nor mechanical genius, but religion and religion alone, and that the eyes of the whole world were now turned towards this land of India for spiritual food, and India must provide it for all the races. It was in India, he said, that the best ideal of mankind existed, and the Western savants were striving hard to understand this ideal enshrined in the Sanskrit literature and the Philosophy of India. A moral obligation therefore rested on the sons of this land to fully equip themselves for the work of enlightening the world on the problems of human existence. In conclusion Swamiji expressed his deep gratitude to His Highness the Raja of Ramnad who had first conceived the idea of his going to Chicago, put it into his head and persistently urged him to accomplish it. Swamiji wanted at least half a dozen more such Rajas who would take real interest in their dear motherland and work for her amelioration in the spiritual line. The meeting over, the Swami was taken in a State-carriage drawn by the Raja himself along with other people in a big procession. Cannon boomed, bands played and rockets shot forth as a mark of welcome. It was a great national festival for the citizens of Ramnad to get back their beloved and revered Swami once again in their midst.

At Ramnad the Swami, while giving a most eloquent and inspiring reply to the address of welcome presented by the Raja, reiterated almost the very same theme and sentiments which he had articulated in his speeches at Pamban and at the Rameswara temple, and exhorted the audience in the following terms: "Let us all work hard, my brethren; this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of the India of the future. She is only sleeping. Arise and awake and see her seated here, on her eternal throne, rejuvenated more glorious than she ever was—this motherland of ours."

Message to India

On his way to Madras, Swamiji visited Paramakudi, Manmadura, Madura, Trichinopalli, Tanjore and Kumbhakonam. In each of these places he received spontaneous ovation from his countrymen and he enthused them in return with his own spirit and awakened them to an appreciation of the intrinsic value and greatness of their glorious cultural traditions. The enthusiasm reached its peak when Swamiji reached Madras. It was Madras that first recognised the superior merits of Swamiji and found in him the worthiest person to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. It was here that the young enthusiasts equipped him for his journey to Chicago and thus enabled him to play the most significant role of a world teacher on the international forum of a religious congregation. The streets and thoroughfares of the great city were profusely decorated;

seventeen triumphal arches were erected; blazing mottos of welcome were everywhere in evidence; the whole public life was at a standstill at his coming. Tens of thousands of people crowded the streets to gain a glimpse of the great Swami who was taken, in a spectacular procession amidst thundering shouts of applause, to the "Castle Kernan"—the palatial residence of Mr. Billigiri Iyengar. "The cynosure of all eyes, he appeared in the midst of that procession like a conqueror returning from the battlefield, crowned with glory—not a conqueror of earthly dominions, but a conqueror of hearts, both Eastern and Western". The Reception Committee formed by the leading Hindu gentlemen of the city like the Hon. Mr. Justice Subrahmanya Iyer, made elaborate preparations for according a right royal reception to this cyclonic monk of India. Regarding the uniqueness of the ovation, a leading local paper wrote: "Of all the official receptions that were ever held in Madras, none could equal the one given to Swami Vivekananda. Such an ovation has not been witnessed in Madras within the memory of the oldest man, and we dare say that the scenes of to-day will remain for ever in the memory of the present generation." Swamiji was extremely delighted to see another of his *gurubhais*, Swami Sivananda, who had hastened to Madras to meet the victorious leader. During the nine days which the Swami spent on this occasion at Madras, twenty-four addresses were presented to him in English, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telegu, and the Swami seized this opportunity to place before the country his message to India and the world in a series of brilliant lectures[18] comprising, among others, *My Plan of Campaign, The Sages of India, Vedanta in Its Relation to Practical Life* and *The Future of India.* "My friends," he said, "my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of truths, of our scriptures, in India and outside India. Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionized. The will is stronger than anything else. Everything must go down before the will, for that comes from God and God Himself; a pure and strong will is omnipotent . . . You have been told and taught that you can do nothing, and non-entities you are becoming every day. Make your nerves strong . . . No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true: Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all knowledge . . . They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism and I also have my own ideal of patriotism. Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart . . . Through the heart comes the inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates; love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe. Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel! Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step . . . Instead of spending your energies in frothy talk, have you found any way out, any practical solution, some help instead of condemnation, some sweet words to soothe their miseries, to bring them out of this living death? Yet that is not all. Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think right? . . . Have you got that steadfastness? If you have these three things each one of you will work miracles."

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[18] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora,* 1956.

"For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note,—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything. All other Gods are sleeping. What vain Gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all round us, the Virat? . . . These are all our Gods—men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship are our own countrymen.

"In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries,—that nation dies, if it succeeds in the attempt . . . Social reform has to be preached in India by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring, and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality . . . Therefore before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas the land should first be deluged with spiritual ideas. The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our Scriptures and Puranas, must be brought out from the books, the monasteries, and the forests and scattered broadcast over the land so that these truths may run like fire all over the country, from north to south and east to west, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from the Indus to the Brahmaputra.

"Aye, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him!

"My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books, and in the possession of a few only, hidden, as it were, in monasteries and in forests—to bring them out; to bring the knowledge out of them, not only from the hands where it is hidden, but from the still more inaccessible chest, the language in which it is preserved, the incrustation of centuries of Sanskrit words. In one word, I want to make them popular. I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India . . . The ideas must be taught in the language of the people; at the same time, Sanskrit education must go on along with it, because the very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige and a power and a strength to the race.

"It seems to us, and to all who come to know, that the conclusions of modern science are the very conclusions the *Vedanta* reached ages ago: only, in modern science they are written in the language of matter. This, then, is another claim of the *Vedanta* upon Western minds, its rationality, the wonderful rationalism of the *Vedanta* . . .

"The world is waiting for the grand idea of universal toleration. It will be a great acquisition to civilization. Nay, no civilization can grow, unless fanaticism, bloodshed, and brutality stop.

"The other idea the world wants from us today . . . is the eternal grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the whole universe. I need not tell you today how the modern researches of the West have demonstrated through physical means, the oneness and the solidarity of the whole universe; how, physically speaking, you and I, the Sun, Moon and Stars, are but little waves or wavelets in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter; how Indian psychology demonstrated ages ago, that, similarly, both body and mind are but mere names or little wavelets in the ocean of matter, the *samasti,* and how, going one step further it is also shown in the *Vedanta* that behind that idea of the unity of the whole show, the real soul is one. There is but one soul throughout the universe, all is but One Existence . . . It is the one great life-giving idea which the world wants from us today . . . They want something more than human sanction for ethical and moral codes to be binding, they want some eternal principle of truth as the sanction of ethics. And where is that eternal sanction to be found except in the only Infinite Reality, that exists in you and in me and in all, in the self, in the Soul? The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers—every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you—but that you and I are really one. Europe wants it today just as much as our down-trodden masses do, and this great principle is even now unconsciously forming the basis of all the latest political and social aspirations that are coming up in England, Germany, in France and in America.

"What our country now wants, are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. That is what we want, that can only be created, established and strengthened, by understanding and realizing the ideal of the *Advaita,* that ideal of the oneness of all. Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you . . . We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore, to preach the *Advaita* aspect of the *Vedanta* is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls.

"Up, India, and conquer the world with your spirituality. Aye, as has been declared on this soil first, love must conquer hatred, hatred cannot conquer itself. Materialism and all its miseries can never be conquered by materialism. Armies when they attempt to conquer armies only multiply and make brutes of humanity. Spirituality must conquer the West."

Bengal's Homage to her Heroic Son

Now came the turn of Bengal, the birthplace of Swami Vivekananda, to accord to her distinguished son a fitting reception. He left Madras by boat. No sooner had the steamer docked at Kidderpore with Swamiji and his English disciples on board than they were taken by train from there to the Sealdah Station (Calcutta) where a vast multitude including his Sannyasin *gurubhais* had already gathered to greet their beloved brother. Immediately on his alighting from the train, he was most cordially received by the Reception Committee headed by Sri Narendranath Sen, the Editor of the *Indian Mirror*. The deafening cheers from the enthusiastic crowd, the singing of devotional songs, shower of flowers and sweet-scented wreaths upon the Swami, and the crushing rush to take the dust of the feet of this spiritual hero, created an emotional scene and atmosphere of an unprecedented nature which beggars description. The horses of the landau whereon the Swami and the Sevier couple were seated were unharnessed, and amidst sky-rending shouts of "Jai Sri Ramakrishna" and "Jai Swami Vivekananda", it was drawn by the young Bengalee boys all along the streets which were beautifully decorated with triumphal arches of welcome, flags and festoons, flowers and evergreens. Thousands cheered him lustily all along the line of march as the party proceeded via Ripon College to Baghbazar where in the palatial building of Rai Pashupati Nath Bose, a banquet had already been arranged for the Swami and his European disciples. In the afternoon they were taken to the beautiful riverside residence of Sri Gopal Lal Seal in Cossipore for their temporary accommodation. Hundreds of people swarmed to the place from day to day to pay homage to the great Swami and to listen to his soul stirring message, as also to know more about his splendid achievements in the West. The Swami could hardly enjoy even a modicum of rest during the day. To give relief to his tired limbs, he began to spend the daytime at the aforesaid Seal's garden and the night with his *gurubhais* in the silent precincts of the Alambazar monastery where the Math had been shifted in the year 1892.

A splendid arrangement was made to present on the 28th of February, 1897, an address of welcome to Swami Vivekananda on behalf of the citizens of Calcutta in the magnificent residence of Raja Radhakanta Deb Bahadur at Sobha Bazar. The meeting was presided over by Raja Benoy Krishna Deb Bahadur and attended by about five thousand people including Rajas and scholars, illustrious citizens and hundreds of college students. The address of welcome was presented to Swami Vivekananda in a silver casket in an atmosphere of profound solemnity. The Swami was introduced by the President as the foremost national figure in the life of India. Swamiji in reply gratefully acknowledged the honour the citizens of Calcutta had shown to him on the occasion and expressed his heartfelt thanks for the recognition they had given to the humble services rendered by him to the humanity at large. He made a specific mention of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansadeva—his teacher, master, hero, ideal and god in life, whose spirit was wholly responsible for his phenomenal success in the foreign lands. "If there has been anything achieved by me", said the Swami, "by thoughts or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine, and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself. Yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man . . . Through thousands of years of chiselling and modelling, the lives of the great prophets of yore come down to us; and yet, in my opinion, not one stands so high in brilliance as that life which I saw with my own eyes, under whose shadow I have lived, at whose feet I have learnt everything,—the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa . . . I do not care in what light you understand this great sage, it matters not how much respect you pay to him, but I challenge you face to face with the fact, that here is a manifestation of the most marvellous power that has been for several centuries in India, and it is your duty, as Hindus, to study this power, to find what has been done for the regeneration, for the good of India and for the good of the human race through it. Aye, long before ideas of universal religion and brotherly feeling between different sects were mooted and discussed in any country in the world, here, in sight of this city, had been living a man whose whole life was a Parliament of Religions as it should be . . . In duty bound therefore for the good of our race, for the good of our religion, I place this great spiritual ideal before you." Referring to the young men of Calcutta, Swamiji said: "Young men of Calcutta, arise, awake, for the time is propitious. Already everything is opening out before us. Be bold and fear not . . . Arise, awake, for your country needs this tremendous sacrifice. It is the young men that will do it. The young, the energetic, the strong, the well-built, the intellectual,—for them is the task. And we have hundreds and thousands of such young men in Calcutta . . . You know how he (Nachiketa) obtained what he desired. What we want is this *shraddha.* What makes the difference between man and man is the difference in this *shraddha* and nothing else . . . Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this *shraddha,* because they believe in their muscles, and if you believe in your spirit, how much more will it work. Believe in that Infinite Soul, the Infinite Power, which, with consensus of opinion, your books and sages preach. That *Atman* which nothing can destroy, in It is Infinite Power only waiting to be called out . . .

". . . I have faith in my country, and especially in the youth of my country. The youth of Bengal have the greatest of all tasks that have ever been placed on the shoulders of young men. I have travelled for the last ten years or so over the whole of India, and my conviction is that from the youth of Bengal will come the power which will raise India once more to her proper spiritual place. Aye, from the youth of Bengal, with this immense amount of feeling and enthusiasm in the blood, will come those heroes, who will march from one corner of the earth to the other, preaching and teaching the eternal spiritual truths of our forefathers. And this is the great work before you. Be not afraid of anything. You will do marvellous work . . . It is fear that is the great cause of misery in the world. It is fear that is the greatest of all superstitions. It is fear that is the cause of our woes, and it is fearlessness that brings heaven even in a moment. Therefore, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.'" Needless to point out that this inspired speech of Swamiji which was a masterpiece of eloquence sent a thrill through the entire audience, and, with the roll of years the explosive ideas articulated through this lecture began to electrify the young generation with a new hope and courage which eventually ushered in a New Order in the eventful annals of modern India.

About this time the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was as usual held at the temple-garden of Dakshineswar. Swami Vivekananda, accompanied by his *gurubhais,* participated in this sacred function. The holy reminiscences of the past coupled with the devotional fervour of the innumerable devotees that mustered strong on this occasion, as also the exalted spiritual atmosphere of the place sanctified by the presence of the Divine Mother and also by the life and realizations of the Great Master, filled Swamiji with an unspeakable joy and emotion. Swamiji caught the eyes of the vast crowds, when he moved from place to place within the campus barefooted, dressed in a flowing *alkhalla* and with a *gerua* turban on the head. It was a veritable spiritual bath for the Swami to go once again with all reverence to the temple of the Mother, the shrine of Sri Radhakantaji, the room where Sri Ramakrishna used to live. He visited also the memorable Panchavati, the meditation-seat and the place of illumination of Sri Ramakrishna, and the sacred Vilva-tree, another scene of spiritual practices of the Master. In the afternoon the Swami returned to the Alambazar Math with a *gurubhai* and a disciple. After a few days another address of welcome was given to Swamiji by the Calcutta public in the Star Theatre. The Swami's lecture on "*The Vedanta in All Its Phases*" in reply to the address was equally impressive. He upheld the greatness of the *Sanatan-Dharma* and the important role the philosophy of *Vedanta* should play in restoring Hinduism once again to its pristine position of sanctity and glory. The *Vedanta,* he proclaimed, must be the background of everything in India if she wanted to get back her initiative in all progressive movements or an all-round growth and development.

Ramakrishna Mission and Its Ideal

Swami Vivekananda now paid serious thoughts to the organisation of his brother-disciples into a powerful and dynamic fraternity,—a spiritual militia that should be dedicated to the service of humanity. The brother monks had so long been accustomed to a life of meditation and cloistered monasticism in keeping with the traditional spiritual ideals of India's monastic orders, and were not mentally prepared to get entangled in any kind of activity, humanitarian or otherwise. Swamiji quickly realized the attitude of his *gurubhais* and immediately applied hismself to the responsible task of converting them to his conception of the new ideal of social and national service that fired him. Though it was extremely painful for the *gurubhais* all on a sudden to get above their orthodox prejudices, their religious individualism and their habit of free life of peaceful meditation, still they could not ignore or set aside as mere bunkum the rational and convincing interpretation of an ideal monastic life which they must hold before the society for their own good as well as for the well-being of the humanity at large. Swamiji asserted that the ancient cloistered monasticism, which was in India concerned primarily with personal liberation, must receive a new orientation at the hands of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. It must not be allowed to remain an institution altogether cut off from the happinesses and sorrows, the hopes and aspirations of the people at large, but should be brought into the full blaze of the work-a-day world to function as an instrument of liberation, both individual and collective. The Order, emphatically said the Swami to his brother-monks, must represent a synthetic ideal of renunciation and service, which not only prescribed a course of strict moral discipline, contemplation and study but also a life of self-dedication at the altar of humanity for the attainment of the highest goal of human existence.

Thus Swamiji's emotional, and at the same time rational, appeal to the intelligence of his *gurubhais* to move with the spirit of the time and to create a new order of monks in India who would dedicate their lives to help and save other souls as well, was eventually responded to by them with all humility and reverence. Out of their profound faith in their leader and knowing his voice to be the voice of their Master, all bowed their heads to him and girded up their loins to jump into the field of philanthropic service and to go to any place in obedience to the behest of Swamiji. This was one of the greatest triumphs Swami Vivekananda achieved at the initial stage of his manifold activities in India. It has been rightly remarked by Romain Rolland, "The two Ramakrishnas—the one whose outspread wings had brooded over the disciples left behind in the dovecote—and the other who, carried on those same wings, had covered the world in the shape of his great disciple—were bound to come into conflict. But the victory was never in doubt: it was a foregone conclusion not only on account of the immense ascendancy of the young conqueror, the superiority of his genius and the prestige of India's acclamation, but on account of the love his brethren bore him and that Ramakrishna had shown for him. He was the Master's anointed."[19] Thus the *gurubhais* not only got reconciled to the new interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings but also welcomed the European disciples of Swamiji into their community without scruple or hesitation. Immediately, Swami Ramakrishnananda, who had been engaged in the ceremonial worship of the Master for twelve years since the inauguration of this new monastic order, and did not leave the precincts of the Math for a single day, went to Madras to start an *Ashrama* there at the bidding of the Swami to spread the message of the Master and interpret the truths of the *Vedanta* in Southern India in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamis Saradananda and Abhedananda had already gone to the West at his call to carry on the work started in America and England; Swami Akhandananda, another of these *gurubhais*, who had travelled on foot to Tibet and the inaccessible Himalayan terrain for many years, and had thereafter worked strenuously for the education of the poor and helpless masses in Rajasthan, now proceeded to carry on relief work in the famine-stricken area in the district of Murshidabad in Bengal and started at Mahula an orphanage for the education of poor children without distinction of caste or creed. Swami Trigunatitananda opened a famine centre at Dinajpur in the year 1897. The other *gurubhais* of the Swami also kept themselves ready to take up works of social usefulness whenever and wherever necessary. Moreover, a brilliant galaxy of immaculate souls, inspired by

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[19] *Life*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. I., pp. 129-130.

Swamiji's lofty ideal of renunciation and service, joined the Order and stood by him to serve the poor in a spirit of worship of the Divine and to preach the cardinal teachings of the scriptures to one and all, without distinction, for their material and spiritual welfare. Thus within an incredibly short period of time, various monasteries (*Math Centres*), Homes of Service (*Sevashramas*), relief centres in times of natural calamities, grew up in various places with the hearty co-operation of his *gurubhais* and his disciples.

Swamiji now seriously thought of organising the hitherto sporadic and unsystematic spiritual and philanthropic activities of his *gurubhais* and of uniting the lay and monastic disciples into an Association for giving a concrete shape to his comprehensive programme of activity, covering the major problems of Indian life, viz. liquidation of illiteracy, rural reconstruction, work among the labouring and backward classes, economic and social uplift of the people, removal of untouchability, female education, relief works, preservation of indigenous culture, dissemination of the accumulated spiritual wisdom of the race and the evolution of a cultural synthesis. With this end in view, he called a meeting of the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the house of Sri Balaram Bose at Baghbazar in the afternoon of May 1, 1897. Swamiji discussed before this representative gathering the need of forming an Association and unfolded the principal objective of this proposed corporate body as well. The assembled members enthusiastically supported the proposal and the aims and objects of the Association were formulated and adopted unanimously as follows in the second meeting held on May, 5:—

1. The Association (*Sangha*) shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission.

2. (*a*) This new Mission is to preach the truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement;

(*b*) to conduct the activities of the movement for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion.

2. Its methods of action are:

(*a*) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses,

(*b*) to promote and encourage arts and industries, and

(*c*) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

4. It should have two branches of action:

(*a*) Indian Work Department and

(*b*) Foreign Department.

(*c*) The activities of the Indian Department should be directed to the establishment of *Maths* and *Ashramas* in different parts of India for the training of *sannyasins* and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others;

(*b*) whereas its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of *Vedanta* in order to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.

5. The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.

6. Anyone who believes in the mission of Sri Ramakrishna, or who sympathizes or is willing to co-operate with the above-mentioned aims and objects of the Association, is eligible for membership.

The aims and objects of the Mission having thus been specified, the Swami himself became the General President and made Swami Brahmananda and Swami Yogananda, the President and the Vice-President, respectively, of the Calcutta Centre. For three years the Ramakrishna Mission held its sitting every Sunday at the house of Balaram Basu at Baghbazar in Calcutta. When, on one occasion, he found one of his *gurubhais* still in doubt as to whether the works initiated by

Swamiji were in full accord with the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Swami was roused to an apostolic mood and fulminated as follows with quivering emotion: "How do you know that these are not in keeping with his ideas? Do you want to shut Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of infinite ideas, within your own limits? I shall break these limits and scatter his ideas broadcast all over the world. ... Infinite are the ideas and infinite are the paths that lead to the goal. Blessed are we that we have found refuge at the feet of our Master, and it is our bounden duty to give the ideas, entrusted to us, freely to the world. . . The thing is this: Sri Ramakrishna is far greater than his disciples understand him to be. He is the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas capable of development in infinite ways. Even if one can find a limit to the knowledge of Brahman, one cannot measure the unfathomable depths of our Master's mind! One gracious glance of his eyes can create a hundred thousand Vivekanandas at this instant! If he chooses now instead to work through me, making me his instrument, I can only bow to his will." Thus the doubts that harassed the souls of his *gurubhais* in this regard were silenced once for all and they were swept away in the maelstrom of apostolic fervour and enthusiasm created by their leader for humanitarian service in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. It redounds not a little to the credit of this great Swami that he bore down all sentimental opposition with the force of his dynamic and convincing ideas and harmonised the two apparently contradictory ideals of renunciation and service in monastic life and gave concrete shape to these divine impulses through the institution started under the name of the Ramakrishna Mission for practising and preaching the Eternal Religion in its universal aspect.

North Indian Tour

Soon after the formation of the Association, Swamiji started, under medical advice, for Almora on May 6, 1897, in the company of some of his *gurubhais* and disciples with a view to recouping his failing health in the bracing climate of that hilly region. Immediately on his arrival there, he was most cordially received by the elite of the city and presented with an address of welcome by Pandit Jawala Dutt Joshi on behalf of the Reception Committee formed for the purpose. During his stay at Almora for two months and a half, Swamiji regained to some extent his lost health, though he had to satisfy from time to time the demands of the public for lectures and talks on a variety of subjects. But he could hardly rest content with this type of sporadic activity concentrated in a particular area in the face of the numerous invitations he now received to visit the different parts of India. Thus from now till January, 1898, Swamiji toured like a whirlwind through the historic places of Northern India, delivering his stirring message to his beloved countrymen with his characteristic zeal and enthusiasm. Whether in the Punjab or in Kashmir, at Khetri or Alwar, at Ajmer or Jodhpur, and at other principal States of Rajputana,—in every place the Swami was the recipient of spontaneous ovations and his pregnant utterances were listened to with great delight and profound respect by all from the highest to the lowest. He came into close contact not only with the Rajas and Maharajas but also with the other sections of the Indian population and placed before them the vital needs of their motherland as also their duties to face the trying situation with courage in both hands.

In the course of this eventful tour, he pointed out in telling terms the glorious achievements of India in the past and also the intrinsic worth and greatness of her cultural heritage handed down to the posterity by her spiritual forbears. Besides, he unfolded before the country a glowing picture of how the spiritual ideas of the race, which had their origin in the soil of India in the dim past, travelled from here to the far distant countries of the East and the West, the North and the South through the shining scores of centuries, considerably influencing the philosophical thoughts of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and the Egyptian Neo-Platonism and also the cultural life of Spain, Germany and other European countries at different periods of history from the most ancient times.

He also traced the abiding influence of Indian thought in the writings of some of the eminent modern European thinkers like Schopenhauer, Kant, Max Muller, Paul Deussen and the like.[20] He emphatically said that it was the perennial spring of spiritual wisdom which must invigorate all the departments of human activity. The eternal principles which were revealed by the saints and sages of India from age to age and which lay enshrined in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the *Gita* and other sacred lores of the Hindus must come to the rescue of the secular life of the present age and also form the very basis of all the future developments in the socio-political life of the country. Above all, he made it distinctly clear that the national well-being depended not upon clinging to the mass of superstitions and local customs which were mere lifeless accretions of ages and needed a weeding out with a strong hand, but upon the acquisition of such noble virtues as purity of character, courage, strength, self-respect, love and service for others in the life of each individual. For, on the strength of the individual lay the strength of the whole nation.

It was during this memorable travel that Swamiji had an interview with the Maharaja of Kashmir in response to an invitation from His Highness, and dwelt *inter alia* upon the significance of preaching *Vedanta* in Europe and

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[20] *Lectures*, 2nd Edn., pp. 378-79.

America, and upon his own mission and plan of work in India. Besides, he had to address a good number of meetings on religious and other subjects of deep national significance. The Swami had also an intimate talk with Babu Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, an officer of the Kashmir State, and also with the Maharaja himself about his idea of establishing a monastery somewhere in Kashmir and received a good deal of encouragement from them in this regard. While at Lahore he met Sri Tirtha Ram Goswami, then a professor of Mathematics in one of the Lahore Colleges. It was under his guidance that the students of the college took a leading part in arranging for public lectures which the Swami delivered there. The relation between the Swami and Tirtha Ram grew so intimate and cordial that the latter presented the Swami with a gold watch on the eve of his departure from here. Swamiji took the watch very kindly but put it back in Tirtha Ram's pocket saying, "Very well, friend, I shall wear it *here* in this pocket." The prophetic utterance of Swamiji did not take much time to fructify. For, some time later, Prof. Tirtha Ram renounced the world, and became widely known as Swami Rama Tirtha, and subsequently preached *Vedanta* both in India and America. At Lahore a very touching incident occurred. Motilal Bose, an old neighbour and playmate of the Swami, awe-struck at the high esteem and reverence in which the Swami was held by hundreds, was in a fix as to how he would now address his old friend. The Swami hearing this from him replied with his childlike simplicity, "Have you gone mad, Moti? Don't you know I am the same Naren and you are the same Moti?" A similar instance happened when Upendranath, another class-mate of his, came to meet him at Balaram Babu's house. The Swami seeing him enter the room stood up and with open arms hugged him to his bosom. There are other touching instances of similar character to show how humble and unostentatious the Swami was even in the midst of his splendid triumphs and great honour. At Alwar, when a reception ceremony was going on and the Swami was surrounded by prominent men, he espied one of his poor but devoted disciples standing at a distance poorly dressed. The Swami without caring for the formalities or for etiquette called aloud "Ramasnehi! Ramasnehi!—for that was the name of the man—and having had him brought before him through the throng of notables enquired about his welfare and talked with him freely as of old. On a previous occasion at Madras, when the Swami was seated in his carriage of honour, he saw his disciple Swami Sadananda standing amidst the huge crowd. He at once shouted out: "Come Sadananda! Come my boy!" And he made his young disciple take his seat with him in the same carriage. These episodes, though apparently very trifling, bring into bold but graceful relief another side of his character—the real characteristics of

Swamiji as a *Sannyasin* divested of all the gorgeous paraphernalia of his achievements and the high distinction as a world teacher.

Training of Eastern and Western Disciples

Having thus completed his lecturing tour, Swamiji came back to Calcutta about the middle of January, 1898, with a view to moulding the life and character of his disciples, both Eastern and Western, so as to make them fit instruments for carrying into practice his plans for the regeneration of India. The Alambazar Math having been considerably damaged by the great earthquake that occurred on the 12th June, 1897, it had to be removed from there in February, 1898, to the rented garden-house of Nilambar Mookherjee in the village of Belur on the western bank of the Ganges. The Swami, in order to establish a permanent home for the Ramakrishna Order, purchased on the 5th March, 1898, a plot of land at Belur on the northern side of the aforesaid garden-house for a sum of Rs. 39,000/- (thirty-nine thousand) which was donated by Swamiji's devoted English admirer Miss Henrietta F. Muller and his American follower Mrs. Ole Bull, and the work of construction was forthwith undertaken. The purchase of this particular site was somewhat in the nature of the fulfilment of a prophecy of Swamiji who, long before his departure for the West, once said to some of his *gurubhais,* whilst standing on the Baranagore ghat: "Something tells me that our permanent Math will be in this neighbourhood across the river." This forecast of the great seer was thus actualized to the letter and spirit in the fulness of time through Divine Dispensation.

Many of Swamiji's Western disciples, including Miss Henrietta F. Muller, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Miss Margaret E. Noble and Mrs. Ole Bull, had by this time come to India and gathered round the magnetic personality of their great teacher at Belur. While living at the monastery at Nilambar Mookherjee's garden-house, the Swami used to frequent the river-side cottages on the newly purchased Belur Math ground, where his European disciples were lodged for the time being, and spent hours daily with them interpreting the ideals of Indian religions in vivid, poetic and dramatic colours. The Swami was anxious that they should make an impartial study of Indian life and culture. They should not only see the glories but also have especially a clear understanding of the problems of the land and bring the ideals and methods of scientific culture to bear upon the task of finding a solution of the same. He made them realize that India's culture had evolved through thousands of years of trial and experimentation till it had attained the highest standard of excellence ever reached by humanity. Inspired by Swamiji's brilliant exposition of the Hindu religious ideals, they caught glimpses of the true import of the ideologies of the Hindus, till they became woven into the texture of their very being. The period of training of the Western disciples of the Swami extended over nearly the entire period of the year 1898 and he put his whole soul to this responsible task. The training they thus received from the Swami brought about a complete change in their mental make-up and made them ardent apostles of the glory and greatness of Hinduism and Hindusthan. Among these Western disciples he particularly chose Miss Nargaret Noble, in whom he had great hope and trust, and as such his illuminating discourses were mainly directed to this accomplished disciple who had come to India on January ,28, 1898, at the call of the Swami to work in conjunction with Miss Muller for the education of Indian women. In a public meeting held at the Star Theatre, over which Swamiji himself presided, Miss Margaret Noble was for the first time introduced by him to the Calcutta public on the 11th March, as 'another gift of England to India' (the other being Miss Henrietta Muller who had already consecrated her life to the good of India). Only a few days later (i.e. on the 15th March, 1898) she took the vow of *Bramacharya* at the hands of her Master at the new monastery at the temple-garden of Nilambar Mookherjee, and was given most appropriately the name of Nivedita (one who is dedicated), as she had decided to devote her whole life to the service of India and the work of Swamiji.

On the 30th March, the Swami left for Darjeeling for the second time to enjoy some rest in that lonely hilly retreat of the Himalayas. But he was not destined to stay there for long. The news of the sudden outbreak of the plague in Calcutta in a virulent form and the widespread panic and confusion prevailing among the people soon brought him down to the plains. Immediately on reaching the Math on May 3, he made hurried preparations with the help of his *gurubhais* and disciples, including Sister Nivedita, to mitigate the sufferings of the afflicted and the terror-stricken. When one of his *gurubhais* told him about the dearth of funds to meet the situation, Swamiji emphatically declared, "Why? we shall sell the newly-bought Math grounds, if necessary! We are Sannyasins, we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily *bhiksha* as we did before. What! should we care for Math and possessions when by disposing of them we could relieve thousands suffering before our eyes!" Fortunately it was not necessary to take this extreme step; for, very soon ample funds poured in for the purpose from some other quarters. The relief rendered to the plague patients and the measures adopted by the Swami and the heroic band of his selfless workers were very much appreciated both by the public and the Government, and made the infant organisation extremely popular to the people at large. They thus nobly exemplified in their lives the practical application of the doctrines of the

Vedanta by means of this loving service to the suffering thousands in times of their direst needs.

Pilgrimage to Amarnath

The concluding phase of Swamiji's tour through historic India now began in the company of a select group of his disciples in response to the repeated requests of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier who had taken up their residence at Almora. On the 11th May the party started from Howrah, and after a brief halt at Nainital, one of the beauty-spots located in the bosom of the Himalayan range, Swamiji reached Almora and became the guest of the Sevier-couple at Thompson House. It was here in the serene solitude of the Himalayas that Sister Nivedita, the spiritual daughter of the Swami, completed the course of her spiritual training at the hands of her Master and, as a result, all her deep-rooted preconceptions, mental obsessions and prejudices were wiped out once for all. It was here that the Swami was greatly shocked to hear the news of the sudden demise of the celebrated saint Pawahari Baba and also of the death of his dear disciple Mr. Goodwin, who passed away at Ootacamund due to an attack of enteric fever. Indeed the loss of such a loving and faithful disciple, who had rendered yeoman's service to Swamiji for so many years with an unswerving spirit of devotion, caused a terrible affliction to the tender heart of the Master. These bereavements were so sudden and shocking that Swamiji became impatient to get away immediately from the place. So he started on the 11th June for Kashmir, accompanied only by Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod and Miss Margaret Noble (i.e. those Western disciples who had come to Almora with him from Calcutta). Swamiji and his companions very much enjoyed the trip to Kashmir in three house-boats up the river Jhelum through the Vale of Srinagar. The time spent in the *Dungas* (house-boats) on the river in and about this capital of Kashmir afforded a unique opportunity to the disciples of the Swami for enriching their fund of knowledge and experience in a variety of ways. After visiting the remarkable places of historical and religious interest in this earthly paradise noted for its seats of culture, spiritual associations and scenic grandeur, Swamiji undertook on the 26th July his memorable pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of Amarnath situated in the glacial gorge of the Western Himalayas. As a special privilege Sister Nivedita was permitted to join him in the pilgrimage. On the way the Swami most scrupulously observed all orthodox customs and rules of conduct befitting a devout pilgrim to the holy temple of Lord Shiva. On the 2nd August, they reached their long-cherished destination. The Swami was seized with divine emotion when he entered the temple and saw before him the unmelting ice-image of *Shiva-Lingam* shining in purity, with the vault itself dripping offerings of water over it. He bowed low before the Lord in deep adoration and was instantly blessed with a mystical experience which he disclosed afterwards as a boon granted by Lord Amarnath to give up his body according to his own sweet will. So saturated did the Swami become with the living presence of that God that for days thereafter he could not speak of anything else than Shiva—the Eternal One, the all-renouncing Great Monk, rapt in profound meditation and completely free from any worldly taint.

Soon after this pilgrimage, when he returned to Srinagar, his mind became fully absorbed in the thought of the Divine Mother Kali. The name of the Goddess Kali was constantly on his lips, and in the intensity of emotion he had a wonderful vision of the Mother as the repository of all good and evil of the universe, as the Primal Source of creation, preservation and destruction,—as love and terror in one. In an ecstasy of delight he bodied forth his spiritual experience in his famous poem, *Kali The Mother,* which ends with a grim picture of the Mother as follows:

"Come, Mother, come!
For Terror is Thy name,
Death is in Thy breath,
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e'er.
Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, Come!

Who dares misery love
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes."

He said to Nivedita: "The Mother Herself is *Brahman*. Even Her curse is blessing. The heart must become a cremation-ground; pride, selfishness, desire, all burnt to ashes. Then and then alone will the Mother come."

Following this experience, the Swami abruptly retired alone to the Coloured Springs of Kshir-Bhavani on the 30th September. Here he offered ritualistic worship to the Goddess with whole-souled devotion and practised severe austerities for the attainment of the grace of the Divine Mother. And as a special *sadhana*, he adored a little daughter of a Brahman Pandit as Uma Kumari (the Divine Virgin). A splendid spiritual illumination soon dawned on him which swept away from his consciousness all thought of Leader, Worker, or Teacher. He was now a transfigured personality, a monk, in all nakedness of *sannyasa*. When he came back to the house-boat on October 6, he exclaimed in all tenderness to his disciples: "It is all Mother now! All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it is only Mother! Mother!".

The Consecration of the Belur Math

The health of Swami Vivekananda was greatly undermined due to the severe strain put on his mind and nerves in the course of this long sojourn in Northern India. Very soon the party returned to Lahore. But Swamiji looked so pale and worn out that he was brought back for rest and treatment to the Belur Math on the 18th October by Swami Sadananda, who had hurried down to Lahore from Almora on the receipt of an express wire. His *gurubhais* were filled with great joy to find their leader once again in their midst; but the condition of his health caused grave anxiety in their minds. Swamiji, without paying any heed to his physical deterioration, took up in right earnest the responsible work of training the members of the Order. The monks and *Brahmacharins* of the Math were thrilled with ineffable delight when the Holy Mother, accompanied by a number of women devotees, visited the Math on the 13th November, the day of the Kali Puja, and thus blessed the site of the permanent abode of the Ramakrishna Order by worshipping the Master there in the picture kept by her in her own shrine. In the afternoon the Holy Mother performed the opening ceremony of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School at Baghbazar, at the request of the Swami. After the sacred function had been over, the Holy Mother "prayed that the blessings of the Great Mother of the universe might be upon the school and that the girls it should train be ideal girls". Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda and Sister Nivedita, who were present there on this occasion, considered this benediction of the Mother as a good omen for the institution inaugurated for an all-round education of Indian womanhood. It was in the year 1918 that the management of the school was formally taken over by the authorities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Elaborate preparations were now made for the consecration of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur. Though the installation ceremony of the image of Sri Ramakrishna took place on December 9, 1898, and the Math was finally shifted from Nilambar Mookherjee's garden-house to the Belur Math on January 2, 1899, the consecration of the newly purchased Math grounds had been celebrated long ago in the early part of the month of March, 1898. On this latter occasion, which was a 'red letter day' in the history of the Ramakrishna Order, Swamiji, after making ablutions in the Ganges and putting on a new *gerua* robe, worshipped the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna at the garden-house of Nilambar Mookherjee with profound veneration. "After worship a procession was formed of the whole Brotherhood, which wended its way by the bank of the Ganges from Nilambar Mookherjee's garden-house to the site of the new monastery, led by the Swami who carried on his right shoulder the urn containing the hallowed remains of

Sri Ramakrishna. The sound of the blowing of conch-shells and the beating of gongs resounded across the river. On the way the Swami said to a disciple:—"The Master once told me,—'I will go and live wheresoever it will be your pleasure to take me, carrying me on your shoulders,—be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage! With faith in that gracious promise I myself am now carrying him to the site of our future Math. Know for certain, my boy, that so long as his name inspires his followers with his ideals of purity, holiness and loving spirit of charity to all men, even so long shall he, the Master, sanctify the place with his hallowed presence."[21] When the Math was in sight, the Swami spoke of the glorious future which he felt it was to have: "It would be a Centre in which would be recognized and practised a grand harmony of all creeds and faiths as exemplified in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and only ideas of religion in its universal aspect would be preached. And from this centre of universal toleration would go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the world."[22]

When the procession reached the Math ground, the sacred urn was placed on a special seat and worshipped with solemn religious rites. Swamiji lighted the sacrificial fire and performed the sacred *viraja homa* which was attended only by the monks of the Order. He was now satisfied that a permanent place and sufficient means to build a temple for the Master with a monastery as the Headquarters of the Order had been found for the dissemination of the universal teachings of the Master. Swamiji said, "... Today I feel free from the weight of the responsibility which I have carried with me for twelve long years. And now the vision comes to my mind! This Math shall become a great centre of learning and *sadhana*. Pious householders will erect houses for themselves on the grounds round this future religious university and live there, with the Sannyasins in the centre. To the south, the followers of the Lord from England and America will come and make their abode."[23]

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[21] *Life*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. II., p. 735.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 735.

A few days later Swamiji disclosed to one of his disciples in the course of a conversation his ideas of the scope and ideals of the Math as follows: "... From here will be disseminated ideals harmonizing *Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga* and *Karma*. The time will come when by the mere will of the Sannyasins of this Math, life will vibrate into the deadened souls of men. All these visions are rising before me. On that land to the south will be the Temple of Learning, modelled after the manner of our ancient *Tols*. In it will be taught Grammar, Philosophy, Arts, Science, Literature, Rhetoric, Hindu Codes of Law, Scriptures, and

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 738.

English. There the young *Brahmacharins* will live and study the *Shastras*. The old institution of *Brahmacharyam* must be established anew. But its foundation must be laid on a broad basis, and many changes and modifications suited to the needs of the times will have to be introduced into it."[24]

Since his return from the North Indian tour to the Belur Math, Swamiji had to remain occasionally in Calcutta for the treatment of asthma from which he had been suffering. But this acute illness notwithstanding, he used to meet even there numerous people from early morning till eight or nine at night. It was through the inspiration of Swamiji that the Bengali fortnightly organ of the Order, the *Udbodhan,* was first brought out with Swami Trigunatitananda as its Editor and Manager on January 14, 1899, with the object of presenting the highest doctrines of the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta* to the people in the light of the universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. With the return of Swami Saradananda from America, the affairs of the Math were very efficiently managed with his help. Religious discourses, study of scriptures and other spiritual and intellectual work went on in the Math with clock-like regularity and precision. The younger members were granted adequate freedom to carry on the works in their respective spheres without much interference. Swamiji in these days laid great stress on the ideals and practice of the monastic life and tried to make new entrants fully conscious of the responsibilities of the life of renunciation they had embraced for the realization of God. He moreover busied himself with regular classes on the *Vedas*, the *Bhagavata*, the *Gita* and other scriptures and exhorted them by saying, "The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man loses faith in himself, death comes. Believe first in yourself and then in God. A handful of strong men will move the world. We need a heart to feel, a brain to conceive and a strong arm to do the work." Thus, through strenuous ceaseless efforts, he succeeded in building up a heroic band of the 'sappers and miners in the army of religion' for the reconstruction of Indian national life and for the diffusion of Vedantic ideas throughout the length and breadth of the world.

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[24] Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I saw Him,* 3rd Edn., p. 145.

Himalayan Monastery

Swamiji now seriously thought of giving a concrete shape to his long-contemplated plan of establishing a monastery in some secluded place of the Himalayas where the people from the East and the West could live together in spiritual comradeship and practise the *Vedanta* philosophy and get their outlook on life greatly widened by a mutual exchange of their highest cultural and spiritual ideas. In the course of his recent itineracy, he had searched in vain for a suitable site for such an *ashrama* in the hills. Eventually Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, accompanied by Swami Swarupananda, travelled far into the interior of the District of Almora and, after a diligent search, selected for the *ashrama* the estate of Mayavati lying at a distance of 50 miles from Almora at an altitude of 6800 ft. and commanding a magnificent view of the eternal snow ranges of the Himalayas. With the approval of the Swami, the spot was immediately purchased and the monastery under the name of the Advaita Ashrama came into existence with his heartfelt blessings on March 19, 1899, which synchronised with the auspicious birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. In order that devotees hailing from different parts of the world and belonging to various faiths might carry on their spiritual practices without let or hindrance, it was enjoined by the Swami as a special rule that in that *Ashrama* there would be no worship of images, pictures or symbols of God, nor any religious ceremony or ritual except the *Viraja Homa*—not even the worship of the Master. Moreover this *Ashrama* became from now the permanent home for the *Prabuddha Bharat,* an English organ of the Ramakrishna Order. This journal, it is to be noted, was first started at Madras in July, 1896, by the Madrasi disciples of Swamiji under the able editorship of Sri B. R. Rajam Iyer, a true Vendantist. But after the death of its gifted editor in May, 1898, its publication remained suspended till it was resumed through the inspiration of Swamiji at the Thompson House at Almora with Swami Swarupananda as its editor, and Mr. Sevier as manager, in August, 1898. Now that a permanent monastery had been established at Mayavati, the office of the *Prabuddha Bharat* was shifted from Almora to this new *Ashrama,* and a small hand-press was also bought and set up there to facilitate the publication of the journal and also the printing of books when necessary. Thus the long-cherished desire of Swamiji to build up an ideal *Ashrama* of this type in some sequestered part of the Himalayas at last came to be materialized through the earnestness and the munificent financial assistance of the Sevier couple who began to live there in a separate bungalow in silent pursuit of their spiritual practices. With the hearty co-operation of his *gurubhais* and the disciples many other institutions of public utility grew up in different parts of India under his directions, and the Swami had the satisfaction to see that the life-giving ideas disseminated through the medium of these centres of activity powerfully worked to bring about a marvellous change in the outlook of the moribund race.

Second Journey to the West

After consolidating his newly started activities in India, Swamiji strongly felt an urge to take a trip to the West to personally inspect how far the works founded in the foreign lands had progressed during his absence. Besides, the doctors, apprehending a sudden physical breakdown of the Swami due to the overstraining of his nerves in the midst of his whirlwind activities in India, had advised him to go on a sea-voyage to recoup his fast deteriorating health. Accompanied by Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda, one of his brother monks well versed in Sanskrit studies, Swamiji boarded the steam-ship 'Golconda' on June 20, 1899, and started for the West. Swamiji, while explaining the reason for his selecting Swami Turiyananda as a suitable person for work in the alien land, said that in himself the people of the West had seen the fighting spirit in defence of the Hindu religion, and now they would find in Swami Turiyananda a person of burning renunciation, meditative habit and calm and retiring disposition—a man born and bred in the best traditions and austere discipline of Brahmanhood.

This sea-voyage afforded Sister Nivedita a golden opportunity to be in more intimate contact with her spiritual Preceptor and to listen, with deep interest and profit, to a lucid comparative analysis of the fundamentals of the historical, cultural and religio-philosophical traditions of the

East and the West from day to day. These in fact served as an eye-opener to Sister Nivedita. She was so deeply impressed and spiritually inspired that she once candidly remarked that it was a pilgrimage to go on a voyage round the world in the company of an enlightened *Guru.* The party reached London on July 31, and after only two weeks' stay in Wimbledon, a suburb of the metropolis, Swamiji left London for America on August 6, accompanied by Swami Turiyananda and his two American disciples, Mrs. Funke and Sister Christine, who had come to London to take him to America. Immediately on his arrival in New York, Swamiji was accommodated in the Ridgely Manor, a beautiful country-residence of Mr. and Mrs. Leggett, and he remained in this peaceful retreat until November 5, to the great delight of his hosts. Being immensely satisfied to see that the *Vedanta* work had made phenomenal progress in America through the energetic activities of his *gurubhai* Swami Abhedananda, Swamiji soon went to California where he founded new Vedanta centres at San Francisco, Oakland and Alameda. During his stay in California, Swamiji received a gift of 160 acres of land through the generosity of Miss Minnie Boock, one of his devoted students. The place with its picturesque sylvan surroundings was ideally situated on the eastern slope of Mount Hamilton in Santa Clara County of California at an elevation of about 2590 ft. away from the din and bustle of town life. Swami Turiyananda went with twelve students to take charge of "Peace Retreat" or *the Shanti Ashrama* as it was appropriately named, and began to give them training in meditation, while he himself lived an austere monastic life as he used to do in India. Gradually the silent but intensely spiritual life which Swami Turiyananda lived in the company of his students in that lonely *Ashrama* exercised a great influence not only upon the select group of his young students but also upon all who, attracted by his luminous personality, came to the monastery for spiritual guidance. Thus the ideas spread far and wide and the work prospered under the able leadership of Swami Turiyananda.

Swami Vivekananda's stay for about a year and a half in America on the occasion of this second visit served some important purposes: A few new centres were opened, previous ones were placed on a sounder footing and fresh acquaintances were made, which contributed considerably to the stabilisation of *Vedanta* work in America. While in California he had to deliver no less than one hundred lectures both in the north and the south of the State, besides private interviews to numerous ardent souls who grew more and more interested to know much about Indian thought and culture. As a matter of fact, he had to move constantly from place to place to fulfil the pressing demands of the ever-increasing number of the admirers of Vedanta philosophy, even though he had no intention this time to harness himself so much to the wheel of ceaseless activity for reasons of his health. But, in his emaciated body he carried a brazier of energy, breathing out action and combat, and plunged headlong into the whirlpool of work for disseminating the universal gospel of his Master, heedless of all consequences. In the meantime Nivedita, who had been on a lecturing tour to gather funds for her girls' school in Calcutta, spoke eloquently on the ideals of Hindu women, ancient arts of India, and such other subjects bearing mainly on Indian culture and religion, and made earnest appeals to the conscience of the enlightened womanhood of America to lend their support to this noble cause of education for Indian women. Very soon her labour was amply rewarded in that the various organised societies of women in America assured substantial financial help to her for the education of women in India.

Swamiji, though full of mirth and sweetness even in the midst of his whirlwind activity, now felt extremely tired from excessive mental and physical strain and his mind longed for complete rest. We get from the letter which he addressed from Alameda to Miss MacLeod on April 18, 1900, a glimpse of this strong yearning to break all bonds and plunge into that unfathomable ocean of spiritual ecstasy which he used to enjoy at the feet of his beloved Master in the temple-garden of Dakshineswar in days long past. The letter reads:

"Work is always difficult. Pray, for me, that my work stops for ever, and my whole soul be absorbed in Mother. Her work, She knows.

"I am well, very well mentally. I feel the rest of the soul more than that of the body. The battles are lost and won! I have bundled my things and am waiting for the great Deliverer.

"Shiva, O Shiva, carry my boat to the other shore!

"After all, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Sri Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature; works and activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions.

"Now I again hear his voice, the same old voice thrilling my soul. Bonds are breaking, love dying, work becoming tasteless; the glamour is off life. Now only the voice of the Master calling! 'I come, Lord, I come!' 'Let the dead bury the dead; follow thou Me!' 'I come, my beloved Lord, I come!'

"Yes, I come! Nirvana is before me! I feel it at times, the same infinite ocean of peace, without a ripple, a breath.

"I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter Peace. I leave none bound; I take no bonds. Whether this body will fall and release me or enter into freedom in the body,—the old man is gone, gone forever, never to come back again!

"The guide, the Guru, the leader, the teacher, has passed away;—the boy, the student, the servant, is left behind.

"... I come, Mother, I come, in thy warm bosom,—floating wheresoever Thou takest me,—in the voiceless, in the strange, in the wonderland—I come, a spectator, no more an actor.

"Oh, it is so calm! My thoughts seem to come from a great, great distance in the interior of my own heart. They seem like faint, distant whispers, and peace is upon everything—sweet, sweet peace—like that one feels for a few moments just before falling into sleep, when things are seen and felt like shadows,—without fear, without love, without emotion,—peace that one feels alone, surrounded with statues and pictures! I come, Lord, I come.

"The world *is,* but not beautiful nor ugly, but as sensations, without exciting any emotion! Oh, the blessedness of it! Everything is good and beautiful, for things are all losing their relative proportions to me,—my body among the first. Om That Existence!"

Towards the latter part of his stay in California Swamiji received an invitation from the Foreign Delegates' Committee of the Congress of the History of Religions to deliver lectures before that distinguished assembly. Though it was organised as a part of the *Paris Exposition Universelle,* it was not a real Parliament of Religions, but was meant exclusively for such scholars as devoted themselves to the study of the origin and history of different religions only. Before starting for Paris, Swamiji visited the Vedanta Society headquarters at New York where Mr. Leggett had resigned his presidentship due to the pressure of his other activities in favour of Dr. Herschell C. Parker of the Columbia College who was unanimously elected to replace him. Swamiji delivered a few public lectures and held conversations for the benefit of his old friends and disciples, and he was immensely pleased at the excellent progress the Vedanta Society had made during this brief period. Thus after finishing his programme of work in America, Swamiji sailed for Paris on July 20, 1900, to attend the famous Congress of the History of Religions.

On reaching Paris, Swamiji was at first the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett at their residence in the *Place des Etats Unis*. But subsequently he began to live with Monsieur Jules Bois, a renowned journalist, philosopher and student of comparative religion, in order that thereby he might enrich his knowledge of French and speak with ease in that tongue in the historic session of the Congress. Though Swamiji attended several sittings of the Congress, his health did not permit him to speak before the distinguished gathering more than twice. In the first lecture he ably debated with the Western Orientalist, Mr. Oppert, who endeavoured to trace the origin of the *Salagrama-sila* and the *Shiva-Lingam* to mere phallicism. Swamiji proved, in the light of the Vedic and other

Indian scriptural evidences, that the "*Shiva-Lingam* and the *Salagrama-sila* had no more to do with sexworship than the Holy Communion in Christianity had in common with cannibalism." The *Shiva-Lingam,* asserted the Swami, had its origin in the idea of the *Yupa-stambha* or *Skambha,* the sacrificial post, idealised in Vedic ritual as the symbol of the Eternal *Brahman ;* whereas "the *Salagrama-silas* were natural stones, resembling the artificially cut stones of the Dhatu Garbha or metal-wombed stone-relic-cases of the Buddhist Stupas, and, thus being first worshipped by the Bauddhas, were gradually adopted into Vaishnavism". As a matter of fact the explanation of the *Salagrama-sila* as phallic emblem was an imaginary invention. He emphatically upheld the theory that it was the degenerate period in India following the downfall of Buddhism, that had brought on the association of sex with the *Shiva-Lingam.* In the second lecture, the Swami in a masterly way dwelt on the Vedas as the common basis of Hinduism as also of Buddhism and every other religious belief in India. Both his lectures were highly appreciated by the Western Orientalists who admitted that the views of the modern school of Sanskrit scholars in the West were largely the same as those of the Swami.

During this period of his stay in Paris, Swamiji got an opportunity to make a critical study of the French culture and also to come into intimate contact with such persons as Prof. Patrick Geddes of

Edinburgh University, Monsieur Jules Bois (whose guest he was), Pere Hyacinthe, Mr. Hiram Maxim, Madame Calve, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, Princess Demidoff, and his own distinguished countryman, Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose, who had also come to attend the Congress and had thrilled the Western scientists with his wonderful scientific discoveries. Swamiji had so much admiration for Dr. Bose that he would frequently point out to his numerous friends the shining genius of this Indian savant whom he called "the pride and glory of Bengal". After the sessions of the Congress had been over, Swamiji went to Brittany to become the guest of Mrs. Ole Bull in a lonely cottage she had taken at Lannion. Here in this solitary retreat Swamiji enjoyed some of the most pleasant days of his present itineracy in the West, in luminous conversations with his hostess and also with Sister Nivedita, who stayed with him for some time before she left for England to try to create interest in her work on behalf of Indian women.

Swamiji, after spending about three months in France, left for Egypt, visiting on the way Vienna, Constantinople and Athens. At the sight of the Sphinx and the Pyramids in Egypt, he went back in imagination to the glorious days of those Pharaohs who built up in the past a mighty Egyptian empire and made it one of the wonders of the world. But the ruins and the relics of the ancient material splendour only deepened in the Swami the sense of ephemerality of everything of this earthly existence and his mind became almost totally abstracted from his environment and began to soar towards wider horizons. It was in Egypt that he seemed to be turning the last pages of the book of his eventful career. It was here again that the Swami had a sudden flash before his mental vision that his devoted disciple and friend Mr. Sevier had given up his body in the far-off Himalayan monastery. This premonition so much upset the Swami that without waiting for a single day he boarded the first steamer for India. This time he sprang a pleasant surprise upon his *guru-bhais* by arriving dressed in European clothes at the Belur Math late at night on December 9, 1900. The joy and excitement of the inmates of the Math knew no bounds when they discovered that the Shahib was none other than their beloved leader who had come back so unostentatiously and so suddenly in their midst.

This time Swamiji returned from the West with quite a different experience about the Occidental civilization and culture. During his first trip to the West, he was dazzled more by the outer glamour of its material greatness, organisational efficiency and scientific development, as also by the apparent democracy of America and Europe. But, in the course of his second journey, he gathered quite a contrary impression. He now discovered an insatiable greed for pelf and power and an unholy competition for self-aggrandisement in the West. He saw, to his horror, a hidden tragedy, a pathetic weariness under the veil of forced expenditure of energy, a deep sorrow under the mask of frivolity. He said to Nivedita, "Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter; but underneath it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface; really it is full of tragic intensity . . . Here (in India) it is sad and gloomy on the surface, but underneath are carelessness and merriment."

At the Journey's End

On his arrival at the Belur Math Swami Vivekananda got a confirmation of his presentiment of the death of Capt. Sevier, which had occurred on October 28, 1900, during (Swamiji's) return voyage. Though the winter was particularly severe that year, Swamiji, accompanied by Swami Sivananda and Swami Sadananda, reached the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati on January 3, 1901, with great difficulty, amid the falling snow and the thick mist and clouds that enveloped the entire path and the surroundings. Mother Sevier and other inmates of the *Ashrama* welcomed the Swami with a mixed feeling of joy and sorrow. No doubt they were mightily delighted to see the Master in their midst, but the condition of his health caused a serious concern to them. They spared no pains to make his stay at the monastery as pleasant and comfortable as possible. The bewitching beauty of the Himalayan scenery, the soothing silence of the sequestered retreat coupled with the devoted service and loving care and kindness of the inmates of the monastery and Mother Sevier removed the fatigues of the journey, and he felt himself quite at home in that elevating atmosphere. But very soon he was painfully surprised to see that a shrine room containing the image of Sri Ramakrishna had been established at the *Ashrama* and that regular Puja was conducted in the shrine with ritualistic paraphernalia in contravention of the rules and regulations which he himself had formulated at the time of the establishment of the monastery for its guidance. Swamiji strongly condemned this introduction of ritualistic worship there, though private meditation, individual and collective study of the scriptures and the teaching of the highest spiritual monism were encouraged. Swamiji's uncompromising attitude in this regard had the desired effect, as it led to the immediate discontinuance of worship and the abolition of the shrine also. After residing at the *Ashrama* for about fifteen days in illuminating spiritual discussion with the Mayavati brotherhood, he had to hasten down to the Belur Math on January 24, 1901, as his asthma was greatly aggravated due to extreme severity of the cold of this Himalayan region.

The arrival of Swamiji at the Belur Math was a source of great rejoicing to his brother monks and his disciples. After taking rest for about two months at the Math and getting his health also a little recouped through close medical care, he started with his aged mother Bhubaneswari Debi on March 18, 1901, on a tour of pilgrimage to some holy places of East Bengal and Assam. They visited Langalbundh, Chandranath and Kamakhya, and also such places as Shillong, Dacca, and Deobhog, the birthplace of Saint Durgacharan Nag of hallowed memory, and came back to the Math in the second week of May. Swamiji resumed his normal activities in spite of his extremely bad health. He held enlightened discourses and scriptural classes for the well-being of the young inmates of the monastery and granted interviews to numerous visitors who flocked to the Belur Math from distant parts of India to pay homage to the great Swami and to draw spiritual inspiration from him. Though he instinctively felt that he was now at his journey's end, still he lived quite a jovial and care-free life in the Math and utilized every hour of the day in rendering service in some form or other to all who needed his guidance for spiritual uplift. He enforced discipline with a strong hand in spite of his physical sufferings, himself showing the way. He held Vedantic classes almost daily until his passing away to train the novices in the methods of meditation and also in the practice of spiritual austerities. He instilled in them a spirit of robust optimism, inspired them with virile self-confidence and looked into the strict observance of the rules and regulations governing the corporate life of the holy brotherhood.

The last days of Swamiji spent at the Belur

Math revealed his monastic life in all its native beauty and artless simplicity. He was free as a *Sannyasin* placed far above all hide-bound conventions. Dressed in *a kaupin,* he would sometimes stroll on the grassy lawn, bare-footed and with a staff in hand, run and play like a merry child with a heterogeneous group of his pet animals—the dog Bagha, the she-goat Hansi, the kid Matru, and an antelope, cows, ducks and geese. He would at times plant fruit trees, sow seeds for vegetables and take delight in horticultural work and in making experiments in cooking. But this jovial engagements notwithstanding, he always maintained an atmosphere of serene peace and sanctity in the monastery. Thus to the brother monks and the disciples, the Swami was a saint, leader, friend, and master—their all-in-all, and to the outside world,—the illustrious Swami Vivekananda who had taken the West by storm in the Parliament of Religions—a preacher, teacher and patriot in one.

In the latter part of the year 1901, he made elaborate arrangements for the worship of the Goddess Durga in the image at the Belur Math. It was solemnized with due *eclat* and appropriate *Shastric* rites and injunctions. The presence of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, who was accommodated on this occasion temporarily in the garden-house of Nilambar Mookherjee, added to the solemnity and sacredness of the ceremony. The same year he observed the *Lakshmi Puja* and *Kali Puja* also at the Belur Math in strict accordance with *Shastric* rituals. The introduction of the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses in the monastery produced a very salutary effect inasmuch as the orthodox section of the Hindu society, who did not see eye to eye with the liberal ways of living and modes of work of the monks and their non-observance of the restrictions of caste, custom and food, heartily welcomed this ceremonial worship and the feeding of devotees and Daridra-Narayanas on such occasions, and gradually became staunch supporters of the humanitarian activities of this new Order of holy brotherhood. Swamiji's health went from bad to worse from day to day in spite of all precautions, and except for his brief visits to Buddha Gaya and Banaras in the company of Rev. Oda and Dr. Okakura of Japan, he had to keep himself confined to the Belur Math for reasons of health. As days rolled on and the final event of his life, the *Mahasamadhi*, drew nearer, his heart became full of the milk of divine compassion and he grew more and more enthusiastic about giving proper training to the new entrants in monastic life. In such an exalted mood was he at this period that his every utterance bespoke a tremendous spiritual consciousness. One day pointing to the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins who stood around him, he exclaimed, "Where will you go to seek *Brahman?* He is immanent in all beings. Here, here is the visible *Brahman!* Shame on those who disregarding the visible *Brahman* set their minds on other things! Here is the *Brah-*

man before you as tangible as a fruit in one's hand! Can't you see! Here—here—here is the *Brahman!*" So forceful were these inspired words of the Swami that they instantly felt the living presence of *Brahman* and stood glued to the spot in deep meditation for nearly a quarter of an hour.

Towards the latter part of the year 1901 some Santal labourers were employed in digging the ground in the campus of the Belur Math. Swamiji who had profound love and sympathy for these poor Santals, served one day a hearty meal to them. When the feeding was over, he said to them with great reverence, "You are Narayanas; today I have entertained the Lord Himself by feeding you!" Thereafter turning to the Sannyasins and Brahmacharins of the Math, he said, "See how simple-hearted these poor illiterate people are! Can you mitigate their misery a little? If not, of what use is your wearing the *Gerua*? Sacrifice everything for the good of others—this is true *Sannyasa* . . . what should we care for homes, we who have made the tree our shelter? Alas! How can we have the heart to put a morsel to our mouths, when our countrymen have not enough wherewith to feed or clothe themselves!. . . Let us, throwing away all pride of learning and study of the *Shastras* and all *Sadhanas* for the attainment of personal *Mukti*, go from village to village devoting our lives to the service of the poor. Let us, through the force of our character and spirituality and our austere living, convince the rich man of his duty to the masses and induce him to give money for the service of the poor and the distressed. Alas! Nobody in our country thinks of the low, the poor and the miserable! These are the backbone of the nation, whose labour produces our food. Where is the man in our country who sympathises with them, who shares in their joys and sorrows!. . . Unless they are raised, this motherland of ours will never awake!. . . I see as clear as day light that the same *Brahman*, the same *Shakti* that is in me is in them as well! Only, there is a difference in the degree of manifestation—that is all. In the whole history of the world, have you ever seen a country rise without a free circulation of national blood throughout its entire body? If one limb is paralysed, then even with the other limbs whole, not much can be done with that body—know this for certain. . . Your duty is to serve the poor and the distressed, without distinction of caste and creed. What business have you to think of the fruits of your action? Your duty is to go on working and every thing will follow of itself. My method of work is to construct, and not to destroy that which is already existing. . . Can't you give away one life for the sake of others? Let the reading of the *Vedanta* and the practising of meditation and the like be left for the next life! Let this body go in the service of others,—and then I shall know that your coming to me has not been in vain. . . After so much *Tapasya*, I have understood this as the highest Truth: 'God is present in every being.

There is no other God besides that. He who serves all beings serves God indeed!"

This is but one of the many luminous instances of how he inspired others into a life of self-dedication and self-less service with the mighty flame burning within him. But this type of emotional outburst all the more seriously told upon his already shattered health. For some days he remained almost bed-ridden due to the aggravation of dropsy which resulted from his chronic diabetes. This alarmingly fast deterioration of his health cast a gloom over the whole monastery. But despite this serious ailment, the Swami did never desist from imparting instructions to his disciples in matters spiritual. He once beautifully explained the meaning of 'grace' as follows: "He who has realised the *Atman* becomes a store-house of great power. From him as the centre and within a certain radius emanates a spiritual force, and all those who come within this circle become animated with his ideas and are overwhelmed by them. Thus without much religious striving they inherit the results of his wonderful spirituality. This is grace."

Again, one morning Swamiji spoke in an inspired mood to his disciple Sarat Chandra Chakravorty about his future plan for the establishment of his much desired *Math* for women somewhere near Calcutta, on the banks of the Ganges, on the same line as the one for men, with the Holy Mother as its central figure and guiding spirit, so that *Brahmacharinis* and women teachers might be trained there to work for the regeneration of women in India. "As a fulfilment of this high-souled desire of the great Swami, a Women's Math under the name of Sri Sarada Math was inaugurated on the 2nd December, 1954 on the occasion of the birth-centenary of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, on the bank of the Ganges, a little to the north of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. It is a happy augury that already a large number of well-educated young women of respectable families have joined this women's Math from different parts of India and dedicated their lives and undertaken works of social usefulness for the uplift of womanhood in and outside India under the banner of the great Master."[25]

About this time Swamiji, though incapacitated by his illness to do any hard outdoor work, utilized his ample leisure in the study of the newly published edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. When told by his disciple, Sarat Chandra Chakravorty, that it was a Herculean task to go through all those twenty-five large volumes and to remember the contents thereof, the Swami who had already finished ten volumes and taken up the eleventh, replied with a mild surprise, "What do you mean? Ask me whatever you like from these ten volumes and I can tell you about it." The curiosity of the disciple was so much intrigued at the Master's words that he could not resist the temptation of asking him many difficult questions from different volumes, and his astonishment and admiration knew no bounds when the Swami did not only answer the questions with all technical details and exactitude but, in some cases, quoted the very language of the books! The Swami told the bewildered disciple that there was nothing miraculous about it. This kind of prodigious retentive power could be attained if one only observed the strictest *Brahmacharya* (continence). He further added, "For the lack of the *Brahmacharya,* we as a nation are becoming poorer and poorer in strength and intellect, and are losing our manhood."

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[25] Swami Tejasananda, *Ramakrishna Movement: Its Ideal & Activities*, 2nd Edn., pp. 23-24.

About three months before his passing away, he became more and more insistent on the practice of meditation and austerities on the part of the novices and the enforcement of regularity and punctuality in all matters that vitally concerned their daily life. But at the same time, for the sake of recreation, he would very often sing or discourse with his *gurubhais* and give himself up to fun and merriment. And occasions were not wanting when in the midst of these conversations, his mind would suddenly swing back to a meditative mood and his countenance would assume a dreamy far-away look. At times he would fly into a passion even at the slightest breach of discipline, reprimand the delinquents and adopt stringent possible measures, irrespective of personalities, to restore normalcy in the routine life of the monks and *Brahmacharins.* "Thus days passed as though they were hours. Whatever the mood in which the Swami might be, for his *gurubhais* and disciples his presence was in itself a constant source of joy and inspiration. Whether he was impatient, whether he reprimanded, whether he was exacting or unreasonable, whether he was the teacher or the meditating sage, whether he was full of mirth or grave,—to his *gurubhais* he was always the beloved "Naren", and to his disciples the blessed and incomparable *Guru*."[26]

Mahasamadhi

Swamiji, who had by now got fully ready for the last great event of his earthly sojourn, felt a strong desire to see all his *Sannyasin* disciples, and himself wrote to them to come if possible for a short visit only. In response to this call, many of his disciples gathered round the Swami from distant parts of the world, though there were still others who could not meet their Master due to their serious preoccupations. But how unbearable and poignant was their grief when only a short while later they came to learn of the sudden demise of their beloved leader! Swamiji from now gradually withdrew himself from the task of personally guiding the affairs of the Math and granted others sufficient latitude to manage their works independently. For he emphatically said, "How often does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them! When men are trained, it is essential that their leader leave them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves!" Nobody could even then guess from his utterances that he would bid goodbye to them all, so soon. A few days before his final exit from the stage of the world, he asked his disciple, Swami Suddhananda, to bring him the Bengali calendar. Maybe Swamiji, turning over the pages of the almanac, mentally decided to pass in *Mahasamadhi* on Friday, the 4th of July, 1902, which however proved to be too true when that great event actually occurred on that very date at ten minutes past nine p.m. Only three days before his passing away, Swamiji, while strolling on the spacious lawn of the Math in the afternoon in the company of his *gurubhai*, Swami Premananda, pointed to the spot where the present temple of the Swami stands, and gravely said, "When I give up the body, cremate it there!"

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[26] *Life*, Mayavati, 2nd Edn., Vol. II., p. 900.

When the supreme day dawned, he looked more cheerful and vigorous, and was, as it were, altogether free from all physical ailments. He got up from bed early in the morning, and after taking his usual tea, entered the shrine, shut all windows and bolted the doors from within—an unusual phenomenon not witnessed for years during the whole period of his residence at the Math. He spent about three hours from eight to eleven in silent meditation inside the chapel. All on a sudden, he burst into a devotional song in praise of the Goddess Kali, the sweet strain of which filled the atmosphere of the monastery with ineffable peace and blessedness. When he came downstairs he was quite a different person altogether,—with his face flushed with spiritual emotion, eyes aflame with divine fire, and mind keyed up to the sublime pitch of devotional thought. In a mood of spiritual intoxication, Swamiji muttered to himself in an almost inaudible voice: "If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done! And yet—how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!" This unguarded utterance of the Swami, which was overheard by Swami Premananda who was standing near by, startled him, as he did never hear such a remark escape the lips of the Swami before. That very day he took his dinner with his brother-monks and disciples in the refectory with great relish. After the repast, at about 1 p.m., he held a class on the *Laghukaumudi* (a standard book on Sanskrit grammar), which lasted for about three hours, and he was full of mirth and humour while explaining in the light of witty stories the underlying meaning of each aphorism. In the afternoon, Swamiji, though considerably fatigued due to his mental exertion for his long-drawn grammar class, went for a walk as far as the Belur Bazar in the company of Swami Premananda. In the course of the long walk, Swamiji spoke *inter alia* feelingly about his proposed scheme of founding a Vedic College in the monastery.

After returning from the walk, Swamiji took his seat in the verandah and talked merrily for a while with his *gurubhais* and disciples who were all about him. But with the setting of the sun, when the shadows of evening gradually descended on the earth and enveloped it with a thick pall of darkness, and the chapel-bell sounded for evening service in the shrine, all went to the temple to attend the *Aratrika*. Swamiji also repaired to his own room upstairs and asked the *Brahmacharin*, who followed him, to open all its windows to let in fresh air. He turned his eyes for a while towards Dakshineswar—the holy place redolent of the sweet reminiscences of the past, where he used to sit at the feet of the Master to receive his heartfelt love and benedictions,—looked wistfully at the blue firmament bespangled with myriads of glittering stars, listened with joy to the soft murmur of the swift-flowing Ganges in front, and felt refreshed at the soothing touch of the cool nocturnal breeze blowing at the time. Indeed, never was Nature so expectant and blissful as she was at this auspicious hour to get back in her lap her tired child who now, with the thin veil of Maya torn to shreds, waited for a final leap into the bosom of the Infinite at the premature age of thirtynine in fulfilment of his prophetic utterance, "I shall not live to be forty." Immediately after the *Aratrika* when the whole atmosphere of the Math was steeped in perfect stillness, Swamiji with his rosary in hand sat in meditation in his room at 7 p.m., turning his face towards the Ganges, and remained in that state of spiritual absorption for nearly an hour. Thereafter, 'he laid himself down on the floor, and, calling the disciple who was waiting outside, asked him to fan his head a little. He had the rosary still in his hand. The disciple thought the Swami was perhaps having a light sleep. About an hour later, his hand shook a little. Then came two deep breaths. The disciple thought he had fallen into *Samadhi*. He then went downstairs and called a *sannyasin*, who came and found on examination that there was neither respiration nor pulse. Meanwhile another *Sannyasin* came, and, thinking him to be in *Samadhi*, began to chant aloud the Master's name continuously, but in no way was the *Samadhi* broken!' The tired child now enjoyed eternal rest in the bosom of the Mother, whence there was no coming back once again to the realm of nescience.

Though the great Swami has broken the prison-walls of earthly existence and soared beyond the grasp of Death in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the words which he spoke long before his passing away, still ring in our ears with a profound significance, 'It may be', he said, 'that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God'. And verily his reassuring words have proved to be true. With the roll of years since his passing away, his message of peace and goodwill has been gathering momentum and securing from day to day a firm foothold in the citadel of human thought and action, and the conviction is growing in every heart that the spirit of Swamiji will not cease to function as a dynamic force in the society of mankind till the whole world attains to the realization of the Highest Truth.

Rightly has it been said by Romain Rolland: "The time is past for the pre-eminence of one incomplete and partial civilization. Asia and Europe, the two giants, are standing face to face as equals for the first time. If they are wise they will work together, and the fruit of their labours will be for all. This 'Greater India', this new India—whose growth politicians and learned men have, ostrich fashion, hidden from us and whose striking effects are now apparent—is impregnated with the soul of Ramakrishna. The twin star of the Paramahamsa and the hero who translated his thought into action, dominates and guides her present destinies. Its warm radiance is the leaven working within the soil of India and fertilizing it. The present leaders of India: the king of thinkers, the king of poets, and the Mahatma—Aurobindo Ghose, Tagore, and Gandhi—have grown, flowered and borne fruits under the double constellation of the Swan and the Eagle . . . The time seems to me to have come for the rest of the world. . . to profit by it."[27]

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[27] Rolland, Romain, *Life of Vivekananda*, 2nd Edn., Vol. II., pp. 311-318.